Moral predicaments in Hollywood cinema : a qualitative study of Singaporean audiences

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**NANYANG
TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY**

SINGAPORE

**MORAL PREDICAMENTS IN HOLLYWOOD
CINEMA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
SINGAPOREAN AUDIENCES**

**WONG Y C SUSAN
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
2019**

**MORAL PREDICAMENTS IN HOLLYWOOD
CINEMA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
SINGAPOREAN AUDIENCES**

WONG YOKE CHEE SUSAN

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School of Humanities

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2019

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, is free of plagiarised materials, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

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Wong Yoke Chee Susan

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my family –

Daddy and Sam: Alas! So soon you had to leave, before my passage is complete.

Jason: The ultimate film connoisseur.

DADDY

“Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message ‘He is Dead’

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest” – W. H. Auden

SAM

“To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.” – William Blake

JASON

“Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me” – Emily Dickinson

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SUMMARY

Since Hollywood films remain the dominant source of movie entertainment in Singapore, this study considered possible influences from the exposure to American culture and values, which may alter perspectives on moral issues in everyday life. The study is informed by the audience reception approach and grounded within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. It examined the reception to films depicting abortion and infidelity within personal and familial relationships among the contemporary multi-religious audience situated in multi-cultural Singapore.

Specifically the study examined how films depict moral predicaments through a phenomenological lens, which could potentially alter or reinforce an audience's usual perspectives on appropriate moral actions and moral character. Content analysis was done on the purposive sample of five Hollywood films: *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1*, (2011); *Revolutionary Road*, (2008); *The Cider House Rules*, (1999); *The Bridges of Madison County*, (1995); *The Age of Innocence*, (1993), within the Deontological, Utilitarianism, and Virtue Ethics frameworks. To understand phenomenological experiences of the films, participants in the study watched all five films and filled out questionnaires detailing their responses to the moral predicaments in the films. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on the purposive and quota sample of 15 Singaporeans between the ages of 20-33 from various religious and ethnic backgrounds to determine their moral perspectives of abortion and infidelity, the two key problems under investigation, among other issues in the films.

The results showed that the audience moral perspectives on infidelity have Kantian overtones while the majority of participants have a utilitarian outlook on abortion. When faced with the mediated form of social reality in the films, their associations with abortion increased because of the possible scenarios that were unacknowledged before but which modified their perspectives on advancing the position that termination is morally right. In

viewing the films, the audiences were also creatively making sense of their experiences as they interpret the moral positions of the films, either associating or disassociating with them according to the moral framework. Thus, the study provides an empirical aspect to Film and Philosophy scholarship and adds knowledge to Audience Reception studies.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), “global box office for all films ... around the world reached \$32.6 billion in 2011, up 3% over 2010’s total” with the Asia-Pacific region showing a 38% increase from 2007, taking in US\$9 billion in 2011 (“Theatrical Market Statistics 2011” 2). Two groups between ages 18-24 and 25-39 registered the largest percentage of frequent moviegoers, where frequency is determined by once a month or more (12). In 2014, global box office receipts for all films released around the world reached \$36.4 billion (“Theatrical Market Statistics 2014” 4). There was an increase in attendance for the 18-24 year olds in 2016 with an average of 6.5 times over the year, and attendance also increased for the 25-39 year olds (“Theatrical Market Statistics 2016” 4). Hollywood films remain the dominant source of movie entertainment in Singapore which is “the seventh most profitable overseas box-office market” for some US distributors accounting for “more than 85% of the box-office revenue” (Fu and Lee 7).

CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

Herbert Schiller asserts that the proliferation of Hollywood productions through international distribution channels propagate American culture in terms of the cultural imperialism thesis through the hegemonic domination of film exports to the rest of the world.¹ During the late 1960s through to the 70s, this thesis was used to explain the dominance of US conglomerations over weaker economies with their horizontal expansion and vertical integration of their culture industries, wielding immense control and power through their media products. As Schiller writes in *Communication and Cultural Domination*:

¹However, in *Cultural Imperialism*, John Tomlinson argues that American exports do not necessarily impose an American culture but that they push their cultural elements throughout the world in the motivation to make profits.

the concept of cultural imperialism today [1975] best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating 'centre of the system'... [and the public are used in the] penetrative process...through the commercialization of broadcasting. (9)

Schiller based his ideas on the commodification of communication and the media produced by capitalist economies (largely the US) which result in a homogenization of content in the culture industries.

Governments also recognised the media as having the power to sway opinions through its content (message). From a Marxist perspective, class struggle and class dominance underlie capitalist societies, and those who control production of the media have hegemony. This engenders dependency on and ensures the continued dominance of the market systems that produce and circulate media products, which in turn fuels the continuation of the system of production. In his book, *The Problem of the Media*, Robert McChesney alludes to the horizontal and vertical integration of the media industries as the basis for the decline in quality and unbiased journalism. He claims the broadcasting system in the US has systemic mechanisms to propagate capitalization, serving the interests of the majority who control the means of disseminating news that favour those in the ruling class (25-34). Similarly, for Singapore, the ruling class utilizes the state controlled media as a form of social control, to disseminate policy information, persuade, influence, or coerce its citizens in its attempts to counteract the effects of cultural imperialism.

Effect on Singapore

Appadurai contends, “globalization involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization [such as film, music, styles of clothing]... which are absorbed into the ... culture economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise, fundamentalism ...” (307). With the steady consumption of film entertainment primarily produced and distributed by the US, the assimilation of American values, culture, points of view about social/moral issues embedded in its media were not underestimated by the government in Singapore. From the 1960s to 1970s, audiences in Singapore were viewed as an unruly public in need of state intervention to curb its susceptibility to immoral influences from Western (particularly US) media. These were mounted in response to the hippy culture in the 1970s and student protests of the 1960s in the West (Barr 318). In these circumstances, its citizens were cast as ingenuous and disorderly masses by the government. State intervention was to circumvent the individualism in society, espoused by the government in the 1970s and 1980s (Sigurðsson 24), and served as a protection against the invasion of western moral values and perceived hedonism.

As Pramaggiore and Wallis state: “Hollywood was the place where the United States perpetuated itself as the universal dream and put the dream into mass production” (343). That ‘dream’ also transmitted seeds of discord among the workforce along with excessive consumerism which undermined the careful construction of pragmatism based on “development and economic success as the symbols of [Singaporean] identity” (Velayutham 54). This prompted a slew of ever changing policies from the Singapore ruling class as armed defense against the perceived corruptible onslaught of Western values. Restrictions such as being served last at public places were imposed on males with long hair because it was symbolic of hippy culture associated with promiscuity and drugs (Gopinathan, “Moral Education” 176). Campaigns were launched and transmitted via the state controlled media to

rein in its citizens to behave in ways that were aligned with Confucian ethics. As Butsch and Livingstone assert, “discourses on nationhood ... [tell] media audiences who they are and how they should behave as members of a nation, in particular in their role as audiences” (4). Between 1979 and 1990, the Singapore government implemented policies to preserve one’s roots as “a coherent defense against ... Western democratic imperialism” (Fareed 126), to combat the undesirable effects of American youth culture and social behaviour in the form of “permissiveness and social indiscipline” that had infested the moral structure of society (Velayutham 57). The polices promoted Mandarin among the Chinese as a form of social cohesion, with the secondary aim of eradicating all Chinese dialects among the Chinese majority, and the establishment of Confucian scholarships, moral, and religious education in schools. More recently, in Singapore, technology has its ramifications. Media literacy of its citizens is called into question, especially towards fabricated news.² This has led the government to address the issue in the media, adopt initiatives and conduct workshops to educate the public on the necessity of being media literate.

McLuhan has a point when he contends in his book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, that it is technology and not necessarily media content that influence lives and culture or the media. His analogy of the media as prisons that have no boundaries is apt because technology enables the transmission of information to the rest of the world so there is widespread accessibility to it. The assumption is that audiences would be compliant consumers of its messages. Thus, McLuhan advocates paying attention to not only the content but the way it is presented. He writes about the interactions of the different types of media by the consumers and maintains that meaning does not lie within the form of media itself or its content, but in the information people gather from their experience with interacting with the medium. In other words, he privileges the tool in which media is received

²See Chia, Lianne and Ng, Kelly. See Lin, et al. for more information on media literacy through education.

over content. However, because most people accept the messages in the media without challenge and without questioning what lies behind media productions, McLuhan urges the necessity of studying and understanding the media as a whole. Therefore, in regard to the consumption of Hollywood films in Singapore, questions about the meanings communicated via particular films to particular groups of people, the frames within which people conceive of the content whether as reality, representations, or distortions of reality are important considerations (Alasuutari 9-25).

HOLLYWOOD INDUSTRY

As Hollywood has a large cinema industry, it is able to produce widely appealing films to a broader global audience, because its objective is to make profits, thus decreasing the “cultural discount” in overseas markets (Crane 374). An importing country’s economic prosperity and “cultural affinity” to the exporting country “fuels the desire for foreign media content [and] linguistic ties between countries [also] facilitate film movement” (Fu and Sim 139). Thus, consumption of US films in Singapore, where English is widely spoken, is not curtailed by cultural differences as both countries share the same language, so the association with American culture among Singaporean audiences may be more pronounced than we think. As O’Shaughnessy and Stadler note, cultural imperialism is “one culture spread[ing] its values and ideas culturally”, thereby influencing traditional cultures through the mass media (465). These have implications for Singaporean audiences in the form of culture levelling and diffusion of their own values, especially over an extended period of exposure³. This is in spite of the propensity of the media authority in Singapore to ban or edit films extensively to preserve the moral fabric, its political ideology, or uphold the religious harmony thatthe

³ The Singapore film industry tapered off productions after its independence in 1965. While there have been successful home box office hits, the productions are sporadic and cannot compare to Hollywood productions in terms of volume and audiences. See Yun, for Singapore’s total film output.

government has so carefully manufactured. As Douglas Kellner observes in his book, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern:*

Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, or moral or evil ... contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire ... and what not to [do] ... and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices, and institutions. (1-4)

The preponderant influence of a particular way of thinking is further compounded by globalization which permeates in all spheres of life in telling us *what to think* (e.g. media effects), what to think *about* (e.g. agenda setting), and even *how* to think (e.g. technological determinism), in order that we may *do* certain things (e.g. become loyal consumers and obedient citizens).

In *Not Yet the Post-Imperialist Era*, Schiller asserts globalization has made most nations more vulnerable to cultural domination since transnational media companies still bearing an American imprint transmit American ideology to the rest of the world through the English language (21-24), the commercialization of broadcasting, the internet, import of communication hardware and software that establish norms and values which may threaten cultural identity and social relations (McPhail 18). However, cultural globalization may instead lead to the strengthening of local identities or the production of new ones as the mass media assists in restoring cultures and revitalizing nations (Ginsburg 39-57). Nonetheless, media contents are now available through the Internet, reaching global audiences who have access to the computer in the age of digitalization (Bourdaa and Hong-Mercier 243). In the context of increasing media globalization, the one-way flow of Hollywood films particularly

to the cinema market of Singapore, with an underdeveloped national cinema, leads to the attendant homogenization of consumer tastes (Fu 814-15).

Hollywood Films

Film constructs images and presents a particular view of the world for the audience to see through mediation. Starting from 1934, the Hollywood Production Code regulated the content of Hollywood films which served as the blueprint for American morality based on “Catholic doctrine”, cast the industry as a “responsible guardian of American moral virtues ... defined by a small but powerful segment of society” to ensure overseas markets remain receptive to Hollywood products (Pramaggiore and Wallis 347-9). The continued appeal of mainstream movies can be attributed to Hollywood’s established and recognizable genres which cater to a broad audience. For instance, dramas typically feature human life and relationships in a poignant and insightful manner. According to Vorderer and Knobloch, “drama dwells on conflict and its resolution by depicting events that impact on the welfare of persons...” (59). Wang and Cheong found that dramas and melodramas tend to represent the “whole gamut of human emotions more evenly, being a reflection of life” (702). Thus, films in a particular genre function as “a set of narrative formulas as a way of transmitting basic social lessons”, transmitting or reinforcing moral codes, “cultural values” and can reflect “*immediate*, albeit unacknowledged, concerns of its audience” (Pramaggiore and Wallis 402-3).

One reason for the popularity of Hollywood productions is that “many films address ethical questions”, prompt moral criticism or present predicaments which make them interesting to audiences (Tersman 111). In *Philosophy through Film*, Mary Litch posits that the philosopher provides arguments to questions and then sets out to justify the claim in theory, so a work of fiction can function as an argument for the audience to ponder and

conclude if a moral action is plausible to him or her (2). A moral argument can be subverted by decisions on aesthetic effects which render it ambiguous, allowing the audience to form conclusions. Thus, films can be the stimuli to understanding the moral perspectives of the audience as they process the implications of moral decisions of the film characters. Likewise, the establishing or point-of-view shots that appear neutral can influence a reading towards a particular moral perspective. As well, dialogue can reveal character and motivations which can persuade an audience that a certain moral action is right. As Kozloff asserts:

Speech is not some abstract, neutral communication code: issues of power and dominance, of empathy and intimacy, are automatically engaged. What the characters say, how they say it, and how the filmgoer is influenced are crucial issues. (26)

Hence, moral meaning does not reside in film alone but is dependent on the reception of its audio-visual properties.

Bordwell claims that the composition and the “effects and functions” of particular films are important considerations as they are “vehicles of implicit and/or symptomatic meanings” that determine “the films’ use of subject matter, ideas, structure, and style” [which] “govern the film’s effects on spectators within social contexts” (263). Through its cinematography, film may position the audience while the audience interprets according to their particular socio-historical and cultural backgrounds. As Downing and Saxton argue, “what is at stake is the extent to which cinematic technology modifies the ethical values” so a study of the “integration of form and content” is therefore paramount (26).⁴ This is because

⁴ This means that the filmmaker’s aesthetic decisions about certain shots in the *mise-end-scène* can modify an ethical view e.g. aestheticizing about the atrocities in the Holocaust may influence the audience to alter his or her view that extermination of humans is sometimes necessary for the greater good.

film can also exploit through its “rhetorical power”, the human tendency to confuse moral and non-moral judgments so film can have a “moral and ideological impact” on an audience (Plantinga 34-5). An audience is assumed to be implicated in the action unfolding on screen and guided by the commentary in the narrative, so the audience’s emotional involvement with a character and the consequences of his/her actions in particular predicaments can provide insight into an audience’s moral perspectives. A film’s technical / aesthetic aspects can elicit associations with specific characters as the audience identifies with the predicaments which can influence an audience’s usual moral perspectives on what are morally right or wrong actions. This association can also prompt an emotional response which can determine an audience’s involvement or disengagement with the narrative.

However, while formal analysis is de rigueur in film studies, it does not address how people relate to film, and the ways in which film communicates with everyday lived experiences. As Livingstone asserts, evidence points to text and reader as co-producers of meaning in audience reception studies (“Rise and Fall” 5). Therefore, considerations of “the registers into which cinema” manipulates the “generic and narrative codes”, how attention is aimed at certain characters, need to be examined along with “the ascription of optical and figural point of view to a given character” to that of the “spectatorial position” (Downing and Saxton 18).

AUDIENCE STUDIES

Early studies have been conducted to ascertain the impact of effects on the mass audience, usually in controlled experiments located in laboratories, based on quantitative findings. Recognition of effects on vulnerable consumers have given rise to moral panics, leading the public in the US to question if cumulative exposure to media violence induce aggression in its mass audience. Recognising the powerful influences of the media has also

led researchers to investigate what audiences were doing with the media; in how they appropriate meanings from and use the media to realise certain pleasures, or as sites of contest in their interpretations of the content.

Cultural Studies offered another approach to the study of audience reception. John Tulloch observes that Alasuutari classified studies conducted with Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model, which is a part of reception theory, as the first generation of audience reception, followed by the second wave of ethnographic research on audiences (151). But ethnographic research commonly done within the field of anthropology, entails lengthy immersion into a particular culture the researcher is studying, compiling extensive field notes based on observations. Researchers studying audiences though, have defended its use in audience research with the caveat that certain assumptions about media consumption are made; "that the political and the structural are manifested in and recreated through everyday social processes and interactions" (Dover 111). Examples are Dover's exploration of media use in a British school and Radway's investigation into women readers of 'Smithton' (a fictitious location), detailed in her book *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Radway's work illustrated that romance publications were successful due to what readers do with the stories and not because of the practices of the publishing industry. David Morley and Charlotte Brunsdon used Hall's model in their *Nationwide* study on a television current affairs programme in two stages. Although Morley found problems with the decoding aspect because of the nature of television texts, results showed decodings were structured by social class positions. Other studies followed, studying television soap opera viewers. But soaps tend to avoid narrative closure, and usually end each episode with a cliffhanger so viewers will tune in for the next episode to find out what happened to the characters. Some examples are *Desperate Housewives*, *The Bold and Beautiful*, and *Revenge*. Hence, the open endings of the text may prompt more divergent readings as well in the process of decoding among the audience.

Texts and Audience Reception

Textual analysis assumes there is an implied reader that the producers of the text have constructed who is knowledgeable enough to decode its meanings as intended. How meaning is derived depends on whether the text is considered central or whether it is the context in which meaning is experienced when interacting with the texts (Staiger, *Media Reception* 8). Structuralists such as Vladimir Propp, Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who work with myths, novels, and folk tales, illustrate how narratives act within particular cultures.⁵ In *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, Hans Jauss considers meaning is context dependent, on when a text is produced versus when a text is read at different historical moments, that an effect on the readers is relevant only when they continue to respond to it. As an example, reading the book by Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, which depicts divorce as scandalous may have a different effect on a Singaporean reader in the 21st century because divorce is widely practiced in society as an avenue out of marriage. Jauss and Benzinger claim the social function of texts occurs when the experience of the reader enters into “the horizon of expectations” of his lived experience (23) and “performs his understanding of the world” which conditions the influence of the text in shaping his social behaviour(45).

Janet Staiger gives an account of spectator images in reaction to the explosion of the space shuttle, *Challenger*, to question the reader how audiences view and interpret the tragedy. She asserts that images “have a powerful cognitive and affective meaning to society” at the time; hence “textual analyses with reception studies can change current understandings of ... film” (*Interpreting Films* 101-123). This enables the researcher to find out whether the text or context is important in the reception process. In her book, *Media Reception Studies*, Staiger argues that audience reception is not “a hermeneutics or truth-finding of the

⁵ Refer Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Poetics of Prose*; Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *The Structural Study of Myth*; Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*; Propp, Vladimir, *The Morphology of The Folk Tale*.

meaning of the text” and that “the enterprise it engages is historical and theoretical” which does not presume a meaning is there for extraction (2). It is not [about] interpreting works but an attempt to understand their changing intelligibility by identifying the codes and interpretative assumptions that give them meaning for different audiences at different periods” (Staiger, *Interpreting Films* 9-10). Thus, unlike earlier research which only focus on “effects” on audiences, reception studies considers “the process of producing interpretations rather than ... providing them” (*Interpreting Films* 10). Therefore, crucial questions about what types of meanings are there in the text for the audience, in what circumstances, and whether these change values over time should be considered. In other words, audience reception does not necessarily preclude the possibility of textual effects on an audience for the reason that films can offer its audiences some creativity in which to ruminate and create meanings from the text; in some instances, audiences are also constrained by the limits placed around the meaning created by producers of those films, such that they orient them towards a certain position. These processes of interpretations offer a window to understanding what meanings a particular scene or film have for an audience, under what circumstances and whether these have any effects on their perspectives of certain social and/moral issues.

In conducting an audience study, texts and textual analysis work in synergy to understand what meanings are there and how audiences interpret them. Put another way, how the media frames the issues and the way our lives intersect with those images have implications in our everyday lives (Bird 167). Therefore, by interrogating the lived experiences that audiences utilize to interpret meanings from the texts, there is a co-construction of knowledge, situated in the roles and evolving conditions that audiences extrapolate from their everyday life. Further, through empirical research, effects whether good, bad, or reinforcing beliefs on audiences within broader contexts are revealed as well,

and whether possible influences of content are ephemeral (confined to a single viewing) or have longer term influences. As Staiger puts it in *Media Reception Studies*, “people learn values from the media” (20); thus understanding audience perspectives on social/moral issues through their interaction with texts have implications on current national policies. Alasuutari suggests research on audiences should be conceived in a broader sense between media and the media messages, which he terms as the third phase of audience reception; designing a research and positioning the “cultural place of the media in the contemporary world” which point the study to a “constructionist orientation” (1-6).⁶

RATIONALE

On a yearly basis, a Singaporean citizen makes on average of five visits to the cinema (Ravenscroft et al. 216), making the nation-state one of the top per capita movie-going public in the world after the US and India, particularly for the under 35-years-old (223). In Singapore, movie entertainment is one primary source of leisure activity. The affordability of cable TV for most households, availability of Netflix and mobile TV for subscribers, video-on-demand, have fostered the ease and convenience with which to acquire such entertainment legally. Besides, the inundation of movie trailers through the ubiquitous large MRT screens on waiting passengers in their daily commute, pique the curiosity of the consumer public of an upcoming film or notify them about the next sequel to their favourite series.⁷ These avenues ensure the continuity of entertainment consumption needs of the public are assuaged which provide a cultural frame that pervades everyday life (Bird 3).

Since Singapore continues to import popular films, Academy Award winners or those that top home box-office charts from the US (Fu and Lee 7), the constant infusion of these

⁶ At the time of publication, “Introduction: Three Phases of Reception Studies” 1-21, in *Rethinking the Media*.

⁷ MRT is the Mass Rapid Transit which is the nation’s train network. Movie trailers are shown on screens along each platform in between information for the next train arrival time, with intervals of anti-terrorism messages showing passengers what to do in the event or prevention of a terrorist attack.

films have fortified consumers with a dependency absorption for American popular culture. As Fu and Lee point out, Singapore has become more “westernized” (12) and films from countries with cultures that are “distant” to Singapore’s are less well-received than Hollywood films (20). Successful and profitable US franchises imported by Singapore: *Twilight Saga*, *Hunger Games*, *Star Wars*, *Mission Impossible*, *the Marvel Cinematic Universe*, *Underworld*; Academy Award winners: *Titanic*, *American Beauty*; top box office hit, *Avatar* are some examples.

Research Gap

Although recently there have been a growing body of work on film audiences (Meers and Biltereyst 131-33), most influential studies were conducted on television audiences located in western countries, although some included mixed ethnicities and subcultures in others. Audience studies in other countries add value and build knowledge of audience reception for other research conducted with specific research methodologies and within specific audience traditions. Film and television mediums are different. These have implications on how content is disseminated, received and interpreted. According to Fiske in *Television Culture*, film caters to a single mode of viewing, so the “power of text over the reader is more justifiable for cinema than for television” (59). This is because while the living room in which television is watched is a site of familiarity, the cinema is an intimate atmosphere where the audience is more subjected to its discourse (59). In other words, the mode of reception and the “hegemony of the text” render the audience more vulnerable (74) to possible influences. But regardless where or through what means one watches a film, Hollywood mainstream narratives usually follow a specific set of film conventions, with a cause-effect chain of events that embodies a judgement. Significantly, audience reception studies have demonstrated that audience reception cannot be taken for granted.

Currently, most studies in Singapore either focus on new media or the quantitative analyses of consumption of Hollywood films but not on audience reception or the appeal of Hollywood films to them. With Singapore's consumption of the majority of films from the US⁸ there is value in further investigation into audience reception, particularly when movie entertainment is legally accessible through a variety of media platforms and the government has perceived it as transmitting values detrimental to the morality of the Singaporean audience. As well, although there is growing scholarship on film and philosophy, there are still very little empirical studies done at the intersection between film and morality and audience reception of morality.

Problems

(In)fidelity

What does (in)fidelity mean and in what way is it right or wrong? By what moral standards do we judge? According to the Department of Statistics' figures for 2015, infidelity was the top reason for divorces in 2014, under the Administration of Muslim Law Act at 21.9 percent or 370 cases with 72 citations of adultery for all civil marriages in 2014. However, these figures may be higher as the top two categories for all divorces in Singapore, living apart for 3 years or more and undesirable behavior do not state whether infidelity is the primary cause. These factors may also obscure real figures on cases of infidelity which do not result in divorce. The family, based on the "Confucian-influenced" ideal of two heterosexual parents and two children (T. S. Lim), or more if one can afford it, is considered the bedrock of Singapore society to mitigate "socially divisive effects" of the knowledge-based economy and globalisation (Rappa and Tan 88). Rifts in a marriage, separations, divorce adjust the

⁸ Imports from Hong Kong are a distant second, followed by Korea.

family dynamics. They bring about various social and economic costs to the family, community, and nation which destabilise the nation's family values.

Abortion

Although abortion rates have fallen among Singaporeans, “over half [were performed] on married women (Agence France Presse) and most women were “in their 20s and 30s” while “some 43 per cent of the abortions were on graduates” in 2013 (S.H.Tan). The country has been unsuccessful in addressing the low fertility rate which has increased the burden of responsibility on the current generation in the financial support and care for the ageing population. Further, to address the gap in the population for the supply of workers to drive its expansion in economic sectors, information and technology and so on, the government turns to immigration and foreign talent to augment its plans. However, as I show in Chapter One, these have and continue to have repercussions on the nation and citizens, due in part by the government's policy of relaxing abortion rules.

Morals

As I have demonstrated, the mass consumption of Hollywood films in Singapore promulgated a culture which was deemed incompatible to Singaporean society. The then-Culture Minister, Dhanabalan, in reference to western media producing countries (especially the US) said in 1983:

In these societies, there is ferment in ideas, especially those that challenge and undermine every traditional value and institution.

One sometimes gets the impression that the last days of Pompeii are being re-enacted in these societies. Every traditional virtue and

value has been insidiously and systematically undermined - be it patriotism or fidelity to marriage partner...or temperance of any desire. (qtd. in Barr 320)

Specifically, there is value in understanding the moral perspectives of Singaporeans on the two issues framed within the wider contexts of relationships, family, and care which are integral factors to the values system the nation has constructed for its citizens. Although constrained by the law in some cases, certain issues are largely left to the religious leaders in secular Singapore to guide its adherents in morally appropriate behaviour. This is based on the assumption that those religiously affiliated will turn to religious tenets for guidance on taking the appropriate moral action when faced with a predicament. This assumption precludes those who are not religious or do not seek out their religious institutions for moral guidance. In addition, Singaporeans are expected to follow a set of changing values that the government has imposed in order to maintain social control of its citizens.

However, values and religious morals are not standards with which a rational person can rely on to assess right or wrong behaviour in specific situations. Normative ethics (comprising Deontology, Utilitarianism, and Virtue Ethics) deals with moral actions and is a set of standards in which any rational person can use, regardless of religious affiliations, to evaluate if an action is morally right or wrong. With knowledge of a standardized moral framework to refer to, moral predicaments involving infidelity and abortion or other relevant issues in the everyday life can be evaluated before an appropriate action is decided and acted upon. This is because normative ethics is a set of universal and consistent principles. They do not change at the whim of governments nor do they adjust themselves to accord with any religious proclamations or prohibitions.

QUESTIONS

How is film treated in the study?

As I have shown in the previous sections, Hollywood films are imbued with American culture and values which are also recognised, contested, and defended by the government in Singapore. This means films from Hollywood would have a particular way of articulating and presenting issues of abortion and infidelity which is relevant to exploring the Singaporean audience reception to these films. How does the audience understand/interpret abortion and infidelity within particular social realities in the films? Thus, I approach the five Hollywood films in this study as products which inform us about the social world according to American culture and values. The films are: *Revolutionary Road*; *The Age of Innocence*; *The Bridges of Madison County*; *The Cider House Rules*; *The Twilight Saga Breaking Dawn – Part 1*. The details on the selection criteria are set out in Chapter Three.

I am also interested by the growing scholarship between philosophy and film. Film, besides being entertaining, is a resource which provides us with experiencing moral exemplars in ‘real’ time, through the dialogue and actions between characters, a mediated space in which to ruminate, debate and decide on appropriate actions especially in regard to moral predicaments. In *Visions of Virtue in Popular Film*, Joseph Kupfer asserts that narratives can function as paradigms of moral standards. Framing his analyses within Aristotelian phronesis (practical wisdom), his book focuses on films that depict individual relationships within familial and social groups. He illustrates how virtue can be developed or inhabited within families and communities. Analysing the language between characters in the 1995 film *Rob Roy*⁹ for instance, Kupfer argues that virtues of respect, fidelity, truthfulness underlie the moral community in the film. In this manner, films can teach us about evaluating

⁹The film features a rape of Roy’s wife which she did not tell him about until later.

proper moral conduct when encountering difficult issues. More importantly, for the study, the selected films act as moral tapestries for the audience to ruminate on moral actions which will afford insights into their moral perspectives on the two key issues of abortion and infidelity.

I therefore approach this study on Singaporean audiences with the position that films are representations of “social realities” (Alasuutari 17), particularly “relevant to an understanding of contemporary culture” (Bird 1) and they provide a cultural and moral resource for audiences. I argue that through engaging with films, audiences are also experiencing the social realities of the characters as they deal with moral predicaments. Through this process, the audiences are assumed to be engaging with morality, and whether they associate or disassociate with particular moral actions and outcomes would offer valuable insights into their moral perspectives. What meanings the audiences derive from the mediated texts also enable me to uncover their constructions of morality. Through unpacking these constructions, moral boundaries concerning what is acceptable and what is not informs us on their moral perspectives which have implications on the communities in which they belong to and the shared national space in which they inhabit. As well, responses to narratives can indicate particular moral concerns and anxieties regarding other issues in the lifeworld.

Who is the audience?

Depending on audience traditions and theories, the audience can be classified as ‘passive’, ‘active’, ‘citizen’, ‘public’ or ‘consumers’ (Butsch, *The Citizen Audience* 42-61). These audiences are framed with integral links to “politics and citizenship... education ... morality and family life ... [and] they define reality and provide bases and justifications for people’s actions and institutional practices” Butsch and Livingstone (1-19). Politically, the Singaporean audience is treated as all of the above depending on the particular discourse at various historical moments in the nation.

In general, in terms of the relationship between film and audience in Singapore, I view the audience, including myself, as consumers of film entertainment. For the purposes of this study, the audience is a construct according to the definitions used in the following quotes. Citing Alasuutari that “audience is ... a discursive construct produced by a particular ‘analytic gaze’ ” (9-25), Tulloch added that audiences may be read in terms of “‘demographic’, as ‘qualitative’ [by researchers], or ‘implied’ by the producers of the texts” (151 – 78). Referring to the latter, Bird observes, “we cannot pretend the power of corporate media producers can somehow be vaporized by the magic wand of audience creativity” (168).

The definitions I borrow from the above scholars about the audience come with a caveat. I contend that at various moments in their interpretations of the films in this study, the audience may vacillate between positions; for instance, from a citizen to an active consumer, or to an implied one and so forth, as they experience the films. It is at these moments that one can relate their interpretations to specific contexts in their lifeworld and understand their agency, their interest/concern, participation, and their belonging to a particular group/community and nation.

DEFINITIONS

Predicament is defined in this study as a difficult choice or decision that has to be made in resolving an issue, where the action involved in each case does not arise out of conflicting moral obligations. For instance, the situation that entails leaving one’s fiancée to marry a pregnant lover is a predicament, because it can be argued that either action, staying with the fiancée or leaving her, is right depending on the specific ethical approaches. A predicament, however, differs from a moral dilemma. For example, the situation Sophie faces in the film, *Sophie’s Choice*, is recognized by some philosophers as a moral dilemma,

because for each child, Sophie has an equally compelling motivation to save him or her. But if she does not choose to save either, both will die so the precept gives rise to conflicting moral obligations.¹⁰

Associate (with texts): to establish or have a connection with issues presented, a film character, (moral) action/outcome in specific scene(s) and/or the film because they resonate with the audience.

Disassociate: no connection to issues presented, a film character, (moral) action/outcome in specific scene(s) because they do not resonate with the audience.

Engagement (with texts): involvement in the social realities of the fictional world, illustrated by but not limited to, audience attention, emotions directed at characters, actions, specific scene(s) and/or film; themes, plot, characters, cinematography.

Disengagement (with texts): limited or no involvement in the social realities of the fictional world based on reasons given by the audience.

Association (with other members of audience): film responses and/or interpretations; responses to interview topics, agreement with other audience members who may or may not share the same demographics.

Disassociation (with other members of audience): film responses and/or interpretations; responses to interview topics, disagreement with other audience members who may not or may not share the same demographics.

¹⁰See McConnell, Terrance for more on moral dilemmas.

Abortion: terminating a pregnancy at any stage

Infidelity: forming an attachment or having casual sexual encounter(s) with another person of the opposite gender while in a relationship with a significant other such as partner, spouse, girl/boy-friend, and fiancé/fiancée

THE STUDY

This exploratory study seeks to investigate the moral perspectives of the Singaporean audiences with the aim of relating the findings to “other areas of society” (Butsch and Livingstone 3). Relatedly, the research informs the moral concerns of a, albeit small, segment of the citizenry on issues that are pertinent to them, which may be underemphasized in the current national agenda.

Guiding question

What meanings are created by the audience in their interpretations of morality in the films in comparison to the ways in which they are presented? From an analysis of the data, I draw connections among the audience moral perspectives. Specific questions under this guiding question map the data interpretations as set out in Chapter Three.

Aims

The study focuses on abortion and infidelity as moral issues within the contexts of familial and personal relationships and the choices that are presented to the characters in the films. It interrogates how cinematic techniques frame particular interpretations or position the audience to associate or disassociate with the moral elements in film. By focusing on these

two current concerns in Singapore, the research seeks to find out if the actions undertaken by the characters in the films have any (un)desirable or reinforcing effects on audience perspectives regarding abortions and (in)fidelity, which may have wider implications for future policy-making regarding rights, family, and population.

The research also aims to uncover the constructions of morality which afford insights into the audience's moral orientations, and the extent their understandings and interpretations of morality are associated with their social-cultural and religious backgrounds, or whether they are more aligned with a normative ethical framework. These have implications for religious, educational, legal institutions, and the nation's values system.

Contribution

The findings will add knowledge to the vast body of work on audience reception, particularly on films. The audiences in this study, although multi-cultural and multi-religious, share an affinity with western (predominantly American) culture through its consumption of products and through the English language. Thus, the study can contribute to future audience reception research. Additionally, the study offers an empirical dimension to the scholarship of film and philosophy.

Approach to the Study

The study is informed by the audience reception approach grounded within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. As this study involves textual analysis, the phenomenological approach and content analysis are employed. The former focuses on how meaning is constructed by the producers through the cinematography and experienced by the audience interpreting the text while the latter provides insights to the meanings in the units of the film and audience responses, "as determined by the context" (Staiger, "Media Reception" 10).

Content analysis will reveal the number of moral elements within each film which can be compared to the audience responses in relation to these elements.

Interviews, questionnaires, and five films are methods used in this study to gather data. These are detailed in Chapter Three of the dissertation. The theoretical moral framework provides a standardized structure to code the moral elements in the texts and moral perspectives of the audience according to universal moral guiding principles of normative ethics. The risk of interpretation bias by the researcher is also reduced as the principles are employed in a deductive way. Audience responses to the films are compared across their oral and written accounts with the film analyses to lend validity to the study.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The introductory chapter gave an overview of the background and statement of the problem. It sets out the research purpose and the rationale for the study. The three approaches which ground the study are detailed. Definitions of predicament, abortion, and infidelity for the study are provided.

Chapter One gives the historical, socio-cultural, political contexts of Singapore where the Singaporean audience is situated and the national “Shared Values.” Normative Ethics according to Aristotle, Kant, and Mill are detailed here.

Chapter Two is a review of the literature on audience studies within the Political Economy and Cultural Studies traditions. Phenomenology, Film and Philosophy are also detailed here. The Research paradigms and research strategy that ground the study are mapped here.

Chapter Three is a detailed account of the methodology that governs this study. It outlines the motivation for the study and the researcher's positionality. The methodology details the approaches of phenomenological film analysis and content analysis. The moral framework of Aristotelian ethics, Kantian and Millian moral principles is listed here for a priori coding frame. Research questions, procedures, and data collection, along with sampling, ethical considerations, and data analysis are detailed in the chapter.

Chapter Four provides the results of the film analyses for *The Age of Innocence* and *The Cider House Rules*.

Chapter Five presents the results and analysis for *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Revolutionary Road* and *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1*.

Chapter Six presents the participants' moral perspectives on the main issues of infidelity and abortion and other themes that emerge in the analysis.

Chapter Seven discusses the findings and implications of the study.

CHAPTER ONE: Singapore, Values, Moral Framework

CONSTRUCTION OF SINGAPORE

In the introductory chapter, I outlined the Singapore government's perception of Western/American culture as a pernicious influence on its citizens. Assuming that effects from consumption of American media are still valid due to the unitary cultural flow, there is a need to find out what sorts of positive/negative/reinforcing influences (if any) on morality exist. Are Singaporeans really 'passive' consumers in need of protection or do they use products, emulate behaviour, to fulfil certain pleasures because these are considered morally or socially (un)desirable? Scholars argue that policies implemented by the government across institutions to combat these supposed threats are merely means to achieve its political ends as outlined below. In order to give the reader an idea of the Singaporean audiences in this study, I provide an overview of the political, religious, socio-cultural, and educational contexts at different historical moments, to illustrate how the government perceives and constructs the citizen-public at various points in its history.

Confucian-based Values

The policies that the government implemented were Confucian-based together with the promotion of Mandarin between 1979 – 1990 to protect the nation's identity against Western cultural imperialism seem counter-intuitive to its "multiculturalism ideology" (Chua 75-6). Singaporeans are classified according to ethnicity: Chinese, Malays, Indians, Others (CMIO), with over 75% of its population comprising Chinese. The multiculturalism ideology that early leadership had ingrained into the citizenry was to prevent further racial riots that had broken out between the Malays and Chinese, so the country could concentrate on a trajectory of economic development, building its defense and infrastructure after the

split from Malaya in 1965. Following Chua, others have posited that the ideology serves as a restraint to curb the everyday practices of its citizens (Chan 84; Lian 19). The multiculturalism ideology was supposed to reject privileging any group, particularly the majority Chinese, with English as a unifying working language in the country to plug into “transnational economic flows” (Velayutham 56). However, proficiency in the language, as more people were educated, also exposed them to influences from the West. In the case of Singapore, policies and norms are constantly morphed into its culture and identity by the authority of the government for pragmatic purposes. As Appadurai observes, fears of influence from the homogenization forces can be exploited for a nation’s own hegemony over its citizens (296), but these are sometimes contested by its citizens. Through the close ties with the state controlled media, the ruling class channels its ideology to and conditions its citizens, to think or behave in a manner that accords with its political principles, nation-building initiatives, and construction of values.

Throughout the 1990s, there were still persistent notions that western values (notably American) were linked to a permissiveness culture such as presented in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, banned in 1983 (Barr 313-20). The government claimed the culture was eroding Singapore’s values and morality (Tan, “Our Shared Values” 454; Fareed 10). As Confucianism places emphasis on conduct within relationships, personal virtue, obedience to authority, family loyalty, and education (Barr 311), these were thought to counteract the obsession with individualism deemed as the root of moral decay in the West (Hoon 155). Hence, the government revitalized its values system and renamed it to Shared Values.¹¹

¹¹ The Shared Values evolved from the “Asian Values” which were used in the early 1990s. See Barr, Michael *Lee Kuan Yew and the ‘Asian Values’ debate*.

SINGAPOREAN 'SHARED' VALUES

The values were initially conceived based on Confucian Ethics (Englehart 549) and were intended to be secular (C. Tan 454).¹² They are: “nation before community and society before self; family as the basic unit of society; community support and respect for the individual; consensus, not conflict; racial and religious harmony” (451). The values were built on the premise that since the majority of the population is Chinese, Singaporeans would be influenced by Confucian values due to their upbringing, socialization, and education in Singapore (454). The assimilation of other racial/cultural groups through their interactions with the Chinese was thought to naturally absorb Confucian values as part of the citizenry. However, the problem was, not many Chinese were even familiar with its tenets and understanding of Confucian ideals was limited only to a few elites (Chua 60). In addition, the Malays felt dislodged from the Confucian discourse which “exists as a *de facto* national ethic” (Chong 402). This discourse was incompatible as an ethos for social life due to the multiplicities of ethnicity and religion in Singapore and has largely been abandoned. Instead, in the 21st century, the values, with some Confucian elements, have evolved with new definitions of respect, responsibility, resilience, integrity, care, and harmony.¹³ Underpinning these shared values is the preparation for its citizens to deal with the aftermath of a terrorist attack.¹⁴

I have illustrated in this section the government’s construction of values are always in flux, evolving according to perceived ‘threats’ at different historical moments. They are not adequate for an individual to evaluate right or wrong conduct. Values are standards of behaviour which are internalized and shared by individuals or groups of people linked by the

¹² “‘Our Shared Values’ in Singapore: A Confucian Perspective”

¹³ See National Integration Council, for a comprehensive definition of each value. For the Singapore 21 Vision, see Charlene Tan’s article, “For Group, (F)or Self: Communitarianism, Confucianism and Values Education in Singapore.”

¹⁴ See Singapore, National Security Coordination Secretariat.

national agenda. Values help in judging what is important. They contribute to the hegemonic discourse about what a nation expects from its citizens and are communicated via the state controlled media, through religious leaders, educational institutions, and social policies. In the case of Singapore, some values are bound to the legal system. This makes it challenging to know if an individual acts in a certain way because of the constraints placed by the law or acting because of his belief in the shared values.

Under the Singapore's Maintenance of Parents Act, Chapter 167B, the penal code makes it unlawful not to provide for one's parents. This is tied to the value of responsibility. How does one then assess if the value of responsibility towards a parent applies when an individual claims the parent was neglectful of or abusive to the child in his upbringing? To complicate matters, the Family Law Act precludes Muslims (Chan 85) which means that within each macro level are different constructions of values that individuals follow. The value of care deemed important to a person may also be trivialised or contested by another. It is a knotty issue, having to untangle the meaning of care when the law makes it legal for abortions but illegal for euthanasia of the terminally ill. What makes one morally right but not for the other? The shared values do not allow its citizens to reason as in the value of integrity, for example, which has no clear ethical principles set out for an individual and is mainly articulated by the National Integration Council as a deterrence to corruption. In Singapore, morality is largely left to the religious leaders because of its secular government.

WHAT IDENTITY? MULTIPLE RELIGIONS, DIVERSE ETHNICITIES

Religion

In the *Sociology of Religion*, Max Weber questions why some cultural systems have much more influence on the economic and political systems than others. He suggests that the success of religious institutions is dependent on whether they function independently in communities where there is separation from the state (207-222). This might seem to apply to

Singapore as the government leaves morality under the purview of the respective religions. However, religious institutions/leaders/persons are not free to preach, practise, or promote any of their beliefs if they conflict with the values of respect and harmony which are thought to be synergistic with resilience when faced with external or internal threats to the nation. This coheres to Weber's observation as well that in order for religious communities to be effective, they cannot be dependent on political leaders. Although not fully integrated with the ruling party in the Weberian sense, religious institutions in Singapore do have to observe certain impositions even though they are consulted regularly when the government needs them to influence its believers to accept its policies. An example is the incorporation of the national syllabi into the curriculum of Islamic schools known as Madrasahs (Norrudin and Jamil). Thus, religious institutions work symbiotically with the government for the nation's interests.

One might also argue that religion functions as a space for its believers to practise the sacred¹⁵ and that religion also functions as a ground for identity as Peter Berger postulates in *The Sacred Canopy*. He argues that religion is a product of society that it is the "sacred canopy" which society builds to give it meaning (25-34); and is the "rootedness of religion in the practical concerns of everyday life" (41). But religion in Singapore is considered as a buttress by the government in which its believers seek divine guidance and practise spirituality as a sense of belonging to a shared community; thus, religion forms only one portion of the identity of Singaporeans, because nation is placed above community and before the self, according to the Confucian based values practised in Singapore. Berger also contends that "in the sphere of the family and of social relationships closely linked to it, religion continues to have considerable 'reality' potential, relevant to the motives of the people (133). While this may be true for Singaporeans in their everyday practices and observances

¹⁵This is true of Singapore as people are free to practise their beliefs in religious institutions. But certain practices are prohibited and are not recognised by the government; for example, Jehovah's Witness and the Unification church, see United States, "Singapore."

according to their religious affiliations, these realities are also constrained within the national discourse in relation to family planning and the values system. Thus, Weber's argument that family and filial piety based on Confucianism are "cultivated in practice by a bureaucratic political organization of domination having a patriarchal base" (210) is true for Singapore.

But if we take the definition of religion as the basis of identity by Berger to be true, the position of religious believers is a precarious one for a multi-religious society, because there will inevitably be conflicts whether articulated, demonstrated or hidden from the public discourse because of different worldviews. These differences extend to social issues like fidelity, abortion, euthanasia, and individual rights. In addition, Singapore has muzzled those who proselytise and incarcerated fervent believers who identify strongly with their religion when they are surveyed to be potential threats to social cohesion. Further, on taking the position that religion functions as a basis of identity means that identity is static. But as I have illustrated, the notion of identity among its citizens is also fluid, moving along with the currents of policy changes by the political leaders. And as I show in the next section, identity is often confused because of the way citizens are classified. These undercurrents preclude citizens from having a permanent identity as suggested by Berger. While religion functions as a space for its believers to practice the sacred as postulated by Berger, Durkheim's ideas about religion desacralize the religious order.

Pickering suggests Émile Durkheim offers two positions on morality which extends to society in the relations between God and society (235-8). The first position is based on the philosophical leanings from Kant where Durkheim argued for a secular morality based on Kantian's principles.¹⁶ The second is the view of God as the foundation of a religious morality and as law maker of the religious order.

¹⁶ See Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories*.

The second position, according to Durkheim, accepts that man wants to realize the ideal in God so he aspires to merge with him. But since man is also part of the collective (here he means society), Durkheim is associating or equating God with society. This is based on the Durkheim idea that man is dualistic. On this view, God can be substituted for society as man is part of the collective. In other words, the second position argues that there is no need for religion as society then becomes the moral authority. However, as Pickering notes, this view conflicts with polytheistic societies (240) as the political system sets laws for society that constrain and dominate us which is similarly the case for Singapore.

To return to Durkheim's first account where he argues for a secular morality, he recreates Kant's epistemology and re-interprets the categories as pliable structures which are determined by society.¹⁷ In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim reverses Kant's emphasis on the individual to society (phenomenon) which is forming the individual. To put another way, how the mind views the world is saturated in a system of values or beliefs which is imposed on by external forces. For Durkheim, religion and morality do not conflict and are directed toward universal principles. What this means is that man can live a rational life in a co-dependent existence with society and vice versa.¹⁸ Durkheim may have a point if a society has a singular religion where everyone shares in its beliefs free from other value orientations; but this may be untenable with globalisation and its cultural flows. As well, in Singapore, there are competing religious moral codes linked to political, educational, and even economic beliefs which perch uneasily somewhere on the hierarchical system of national values which sits at the top of the pyramid. In this regard, Berger and Luckmann's account of socialisation in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, means that

¹⁷ See Kant, *Cambridge Companion to Critique of Pure Reason*, especially helpful in distinguishing between appearance and reality (phenomena and noumena) in reference to knowledge. In essence, we cannot know the thing in itself. Also Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*; *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.

¹⁸ Kant's Universal Principles however are directed to individuals where each rational being acts morally because of good will; when generalized to everyone else, create a Kingdom of Ends where everyone needs are met in a reciprocal relationship. So Kant's foundation of morality is not based on co-dependency.

theology would take a back seat; “everyday life appears less ongoingly penetrated by scared forces” (129) and the lived world would be closer to the aims of the values system in Singapore. This is because the authors claim that “the body of theological knowledge is ... removed from the general stock of knowledge of the society and thus becomes *intrinsically* more difficult to acquire” (129). Over time, therefore, people and communities interacting in a society create and learn from representations of each other’s actions which become ingrained in a reciprocal relationship so that interactions become “institutionalized”, where meaning and therefore reality become embedded in the institutional practices, so reality is said to be “socially constructed” (130-163). This seems to be what the values system aspires to. Still, one cannot be sure as there is a plurality of religious beliefs and non-religious views in Singapore. For the latter, these may conflict with the beliefs of the religiously affiliated.

Ethnicity/Culture

The concept of “one united people”¹⁹ inscribed in Singapore’s national pledge and extolled by the government with reference to the integration of the four main categories of ethnicities that co-exist here is still a tenuous one (Loong, “Race”). Although “dissonance is minimal” because of the congruence between the official articulation and private/everyday expression of multiculturalism (Lian 16), media, education policies (Koh, “Working Against Globalisation” 360-67), among others, engineer and reinforce this social construction of a heterogeneous population with distinct cultures and religious beliefs so the Singaporean identity remains malleable to state discourse on nationhood (Koh 75-6; K. Tan 73²⁰). This has resulted in re-imaginings of the identities in its citizens at different historical moments in their lives and in different socio-cultural contexts.

¹⁹ See Singapore, Public Service Division.

²⁰ See Koh, “Imagining the Singapore ‘Nation’ and ‘Identity’” and Tan, Kenneth “The Ideology of Pragmatism in Singapore.”

A field survey, conducted by Lai Ah Eng, of Singaporeans residing in Sydney in the late 1990s, revealed how Singaporean citizens locate themselves “territorially” (163). Some identified themselves as Chinese first because it is their ethnicity they identify with, and some as Singaporeans to delineate themselves from the Chinese in China. Multiculturalism is based on racialisation as classified under CMIO²¹ and as Lai argues, prevents Singaporeans from identifying themselves properly, particularly those with bi-racial identities. The situation is more complicated with the influx of immigrants into the country. As Yeoh and Chang argue, Singapore’s immigration policy “will fray the country’s social fabric [as] competition for space and amenities will heighten” and they suggest “the national ideology of ‘one people, one country’ needs to be recast anew to take into account new spatialities” (1030). This is crucial for the negotiation between creating a strong sense of Singaporean identity among its citizens and transnational relationships with foreigners bringing in values that are not compatible with the values system the government has crafted and used in every facet of policy-making for the nation.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Infidelity

Policies in Singapore regarding family are ambivalent. For example, state policies apply only to the ‘model family’ for the government to achieve “specific social goals”, leaving behind those on the fringe; hence, there are “moral implications” for children from failed relationships who may be marginalised (Rappa and Tan 90). In relation to infidelity, then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew lamented that the social problem was attributed to the educated women as they do not have “to put up with unhappy marriages” because of financial

²¹ Chinese, Malay, Indians, Others; the latter category used to be known as Eurasians and the change caused some consternation among the race.

independence (Fareed 113). His statement implies that it is the women who are initiating divorce and that infidelity is usually committed by men but media has pointed out adultery applies to both genders (T. Tan). Nonetheless, to encourage more people to get married, the government organized dating events for singles to meet but they were to do so according to similar educational qualifications.

Abortion

Since the 1960s, the government has championed contraceptives, abortion, sterilisation and eugenics and has been accused as a “social engineer” (Barr 328)²². Fearing a population explosion, the government initiated the “Stop at Two” campaign, promoted sterilization with incentives, and changed its abortion laws to allow easy termination of pregnancies. As Hoon argues, the “family values” allowed the state to intervene in the reproductive rights and marriage because nation went before individual rights (157), and some observe the current predicament of the low fertility rate is a result of the government’s own making. The government’s policy regarding population control was so successful that it had to intervene again. The graduate mother’s scheme was introduced to encourage tertiary educated women to have more children (Lyons-Lee 1-19). This policy caused a public outcry and was also unsuccessful. As Chong contends, the threads of Confucianism are woven into the national discourse – appropriated when necessary to deploy decision-making to secure the acquiescence of the citizenry in a number of policies, including abortion for the “less educated” (402).

Population

To increase the population, in the 1990s, Singapore allowed Chinese immigrants from

²² For examples, see “Singapore’s Campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s”; Girl or Boy, Teenage Marriage, Graduate Mother’s Scheme (3-4) and Males with Long Hair (12) which was a response to the hippy culture.

Hong Kong into the country to maintain the Chinese population in Singapore at 75% (Chua 69). Figures, however, show “63 percent of Singaporeans” who were polled in 2010 consider the “increasing number of foreigners” would weaken its citizens’ sense of a unified nation (Tan, “Our Shared Values” 449). Policies intended to attract talent were feared to result in preferential treatment of noncitizens and citizenship will lose its advantages; thus, in response to globalisation, Singapore made changes to its education system (Gopinathan, “Globalisation” 65-7).

MORAL EDUCATION

In an interview, then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew defended Confucian knowledge in Singapore schools. He declared that the fault with the American system was the “erosion of the moral underpinnings of a society and the diminution of personal responsibility ...[and] man needs a certain moral sense of right and wrong” claiming, “westerners have abandoned an ethical basis for society” (Fareed 112). According to Gopinatham, schools were seen as sites for preparing “the country’s labour force ... for social participation, for political and social identity formation ... for the production of national elites ... [so] one should therefore expect that if state power is being transformed then this will impact on policy” (“Globalisation” 55).

With a multi-cultural society however, Confucianism may be at odds with other ethnicities, not to mention that not all Chinese identify with its tenets, as I have stated in the beginning of this chapter. However, others have argued that it is precisely through some of the tenets, for example, filial piety, that transcends cultural boundaries. As Tan and Ibrahim posit: “Confucian education seeks to develop ... human nature through receiving instruction and moral self-cultivation ... with loving one’s parents, a child gradually learns to love other people in the community ...” (401). It is thought that with self-cultivation, which is the

process of internalization, the appropriation of and application of knowledge by the learner would allow an individual to develop some form of moral reasoning in the evaluation of morality. Interestingly, how that actually applies is not fully addressed. But in terms of communicating its shared values, the nation has used education as a vehicle in ways “the state makes itself relevant to its citizens ... and in which it engages with the wider community” (Gopinathan, “Globalisation” 68). However, Confucian knowledge in the school curriculum as part of its Religious Knowledge course failed due to the uproar that the government was “sinicising” Singapore (Chong 403). This was demonstrated by the enrolment rate that was below the state’s expectation (Englehart 557).

Moral education in Singapore was to serve the pragmatic interests of the government in the 1980s and as its interests evolve, so did the syllabus which changed to the Civics and Moral Education (CME) course in 1991 (Tan and Chew 597-98). However, this course was about imparting knowledge of other religions in Singapore which again brought problems for its multi-religious students, as Tan notes (“The Teaching of Religious Knowledge” 184). As Koh observes, the national education curriculum changes according to the political leaders who are “driving the imagining of the national identity” (“Imagining the Singapore” 78-84). It is not about educating its citizens to be morally literate.

Summary

I have given an account of the historical, political, socio-cultural contexts to orient the reader on how the Singaporean audience is positioned by its political leaders and why abortion and (in)fidelity are relevant to national interests. I have also outlined here, as in the introductory chapter, what the government perceives of American cultural products as transmitting undesirable values. Based on this assumption then, Hollywood films that portray infidelity with its outcomes or show abortion as a taken for granted solution would have some

effects on the audience, especially those who watch films frequently. For the Singaporean audience in this study, what values they receive from the films are important to understanding society and the perceived effects of culture. However, at the core of the nation's political ideology is also a system of changing values which tares every facet of its citizens' lifeworld in its role as a social engineer, such that abortion, sanctioned initially as a means to population control, becomes the solution for individual family planning, according to the statistics. I have illustrated that values and religious morals may not be tenable as they sometimes conflict because of the competing national interests. More importantly, morality based on religious affiliation is never neutral. As well, the various botched attempts at introducing moral education also have varying results which mean that currently there are groups of people who have passed through the educational system with disparate knowledge of what morality actually means or how it can be applied in a rational manner. With an increasing new immigrant population along with more disparate religious affiliations, there is a need for an alternative; a consistent set of guiding moral principles that could be introduced which rational persons could use. Decisions about right and wrong permeate everyday life and religion or the 'shared values' do not address a full range of situations or offer moral choices in predicaments. In the next section, I detail the moral framework for examining the moral orientation in the films and to find out in what ways the audience's moral perspectives might be aligned to the three ethical approaches of Deontology, Virtue Ethics, and Utilitarianism in the interpretations of moral issues.

MORAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the normative moral framework of Virtue Ethics, Deontology, and Utilitarianism. By way of a preamble to discussing the framework, I sketch out the

distinctions of morality; descriptive and normative.²³ A normative code of conduct is the standard that allows for moral choices to be made under specified conditions which is put forward by all rational persons to follow. A descriptive morality refers to certain codes of behaviour which is put forth by society, a group, or individual and accepted to be the code which everyone follows. In other words, a descriptive code of conduct is based on what people think is right on a particular issue. In Singapore, people would accept the code of conduct that is legislated by the government as right even if they believe otherwise, according to their descriptive codes of morality. This explains why the current status of the Singapore penal code making sexual relations between persons of the same gender wrong has wrought contention between certain groups of people and those affected by the law (P.L. Lim). This is because, Gert and Gert explain, when the guide to conduct put forward by, for example, a religious group conflicts with the guide to conduct put forward by society, it is not clear whether there are “conflicting moralities, conflicting elements within morality, or that the code of the religious group conflicts with morality” (par.1).

Moreover, when morality is used in its descriptive sense, it sometimes does not refer to the code of a society, but to the code of a group or an individual. For example, the Catholic moral code that divorce is impermissible may be rejected by Muslims for the simple reason that Islam does not forbid divorce. Although the code of conduct that is put forward by the government pertains to the law, it does not necessarily apply to what constitutes morally right or wrong actions that can be accepted by all rational persons. To put another way, a normative framework provides a guide for moral choices to be made in accordance to how one ought to act under certain circumstances. Hence, a normative framework is suited to this

²³ I do not use the term ‘ethics’ in this study because it refers to a standard or guide that an individual adopts for one’s own behaviour for the reason that moral perspectives sometimes change. For example, if one holds that abortion is morally wrong at a particular point in time, it does not follow that it will be wrong for the individual when she considers it later due to the inability to provide for the child financially. In this case, the individual’s moral perspective accords with Kant’s view that abortion is wrong in the first instance but her moral perspective changes to a utilitarian one because she is aborting to bring about the best outcome for herself.

study because it is based on codes of conduct that apply regardless of individual ethnicities or religious affiliations. Besides, a descriptive moral framework cannot apply to the study of moral content in films for the reasons that the characters are fictional and their moral character and actions are revealed only as the narrative unfolds. By interrogating individual responses to the films in this study, we can understand the individual perceptions of moral character and what individuals perceive as morally right or wrong actions because the normative framework provides a guide for moral choices and for making morally correct decisions.

Basis for the Research

The theoretical basis for this research combines two contrasting influential approaches to study ethical behavior: Deontological (duty-based ethics), Teleological (consequence-based ethics), and a third which assess moral character.²⁴ Deontology is associated with Immanuel Kant, while the second approach, commonly referred to as Utilitarianism, was advanced by John Stuart Mill.²⁵ Both methodologies are known as standards by which to judge and justify ethically right or wrong behaviour. The third approach, Virtue Ethics, is based on the Aristotelian conception of virtues in relation to good character and requires an examination of a person's intentions when faced with a moral choice.

Virtue Ethics

The Aristotelian conception of virtues refers to excellent traits of character. Virtue, according to Aristotle is what makes a human being good. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

²⁴ Hursthouse classifies the three approaches to normative ethics as such a framework. Kant also outlines virtues as traits possessed by rational agents who fulfil their duties and consequentialists define virtues as traits that yield good outcomes.

²⁵ An early account of the utilitarian approach is presented by Jeremy Bentham but was further refined by Mill.

Aristotle lists a set of moral virtues (“Nicomachean Ethics” 267-296). Actions of a virtuous person are derived from reason and choices of an individual. For Aristotle, choice is related to virtue (258). He says it is about “the end, then, being what we want, and the things contributing to the end being what we deliberate about and choose, actions concerning the latter will be according to choice and voluntary” (263). In other words, by beginning with a goal in mind the process of deliberation, according to Aristotle, is by reasoning backwards until the individual is able to see and take the right moral action. Deliberating before deciding to take action is especially applicable to difficult situations. But Aristotle also contends that some actions do not need the type of deliberation he discusses about; for example, being generous may not need as much deliberation. It is when a person is in control of reason, he is said to have practical wisdom to choose to act between the mean which is of two extremes – excess and deficiency. This would be the state of harmony because the soul is said to be unified when a person is not conflicted on what action to take.

A person wanting of morals is said to be deficient in character. For instance, a person might be incensed about the interrogation techniques, such as waterboarding and humiliation of detainees by the CIA depicted in the film *Zero Dark Thirty*, if he cares about forms of mistreatment on fellow human beings. To do so would be, in Aristotle’s view, an indication of good character. For Aristotle states, the virtue of good temper “is a mean with respect to anger” of which the “excess might be called a sort of irascibility” (294). What this means in the example, if the CIA merely detained the terrorists with no acts of torture performed on them, and one gets angry, then according to Aristotle, this would indicate a morally excessive character which is not a desirable trait. However, if one is not angry at the injustice committed against another, Aristotle thinks they are “fools” (294). What Aristotle maintains is there will be situations where certain reactions are called for and only a virtuous person, that is, always acting between the mean would act morally relative to the situation.

Thus, at times anger is appropriate while calmness is indicated at other times. However, Aristotle concedes that to always act according to the mean would be a challenging task and he advocates that striving for the next best would be good enough, to take “the least of two evils” (252).

In the *Magna Moralia*, Aristotle speaks about continence or *enkrateia*, and incontinence or *akrasia* as not being praiseworthy as the virtues (*The Complete Works* 436-446). A person who is enkratic acts according to reason but experience some sort of pathos, while a person who is incontinent experiences pathos and acts contrary to reason. In other words, the enkratic person experiences emotions that cause conflict in choosing actions based on reason, because he is ruled by passion. The two types of *akrasia* are *propeteia* (impetuosity) and *astheneia* (weakness). The person who has this weakness deliberates before choosing to act, but acts under the influence of passion instead of reason. The impetuous person will just act according to passion without deliberating on his course of action through reason. Once acted upon, the person regrets even though prior to the act, he experiences no internal conflict. Aristotle gives an account of *akrasia* to show it is a state to be avoided in relation to the appetite for pleasure and anger as a sign of moral weakness. Hence, we should engage in rational activity to live well as virtuous rational human beings.

Aristotle details a list of behaviour that contravenes the mean. Listed in the following are vices of excess and vices of deficiency relating to desire or sphere of action. Thus, to act according to the mean means one has to behave in between the two extremes.

Desire/sphere of action	Vices of excess	Vices of deficiency
Fear of danger	Rashness	Cowardice
Pleasure	Over-indulgence	Insensibility
Small giving	Extravagance	Stinginess
Great giving	Vulgarity	Pettiness
Honours	Conceit	Pusillanimity
Achievement	Over Ambition	Undue humility
Anger	Irascibility or ill temper	Impassivity
Truth	Boastfulness	Mock modesty
Amusement	Buffoonery in conversation	Humourless
Fear of disgrace	Excessive shame	Shamelessness
Resentment for injustice	Envy (indignation)	Malicious enjoyment
Social	Flattery	Unfriendliness

Kantian Principles

Kant's moral philosophy specifies certain moral duties that are seen as having intrinsic value in and of themselves without the need for further justification, that is, the rationale for one's action is because of an obligation to do one's duty which is the necessity to act in accordance with the moral law. For Kant, morality is grounded in reason alone and on this basis, only rational human beings are granted the status of moral agents who have the

capacity to exercise both reason and free will to make decisions and choose actions. Further, the justification of an action rests solely on the motive or intent of the agent and not the outcome of an action. A pivotal tenet of Kant's moral philosophy is his concept of autonomy, the good will which concerns rational agency. He states: "The will itself has no determining ground, on the contrary, insofar as it can determine choice, it is practical reason itself...that choice which is determined by our reason is called free choice...choice determined by inclination would be animal impulse" (12) and "obligation is the necessity of a free action under the categorical imperative of reason" (21).²⁶ By Kant's definition, freedom of choice does not mean one can do whatever one pleases; rather, it is because of reason, that one is constrained to do the right thing, to fulfil one's duty. It is helpful to note here that one can only be held morally responsible for things within one's control, the 'ought' implies 'can' premise. In addition, an action is considered praiseworthy only if it is done out of respect for the moral law. In other words, if I donate money regularly to charities because the act of giving gives me pleasure, the act is not considered praiseworthy. For an action to be praiseworthy, it has to be done according to duty regardless of the goal or consequences.

An action must satisfy a moral obligation through a test of its universalizability in the form of the Categorical Imperative (CI). It is Kant's fundamental moral precept, used to determine whether an action is morally permissible regardless of one's goal. The first formulation of the CI (Universal Law) tests for an action to be morally right, if it be generalized to everyone else; that is, one can will it to be a universal law. For instance, if one commits suicide to obliterate pain for the motive of ending suffering, the action is impermissible under the universal law, the first formulation of the CI, because everyone will die to escape agony. Hence, suicide is impermissible, for it also contradicts one's inclination

²⁶ See Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*, for a comprehensive explanation of Kant's Universal Law, The Kingdom of Ends Formula, The Formula for Humanity, the notion of autonomy in relation to free will, and perfect/imperfect duties.

to preserve good health. Moreover, the killing of oneself flouts the law of not using a person as a mere means to achieve an end, which is to avoid suffering here.

The second formulation of the CI (Law of Humanity), never use a person as a mere means to an end, because Kant holds that all rational beings have intrinsic value and should be treated with dignity, “degrade no other man merely as a means to personal ends” (114). For instance, using another’s body to satiate one’s sexual appetite, even though sex is consensual for both parties, is akin to treating a person’s body as a thing. Kant equates the sexual act with using another as a mere means to an end and only marriage can neutralize the sexual objectification of both partners.²⁷ Since Kant links sexual appetite to animal impulses, he is advocating that humans as rational beings do have a duty to treat their persons with dignity. Kant states that giving of oneself in a sexual act is therefore akin to treating the body as a thing to give away, no matter how brief the exchange might be. It is only within a marriage, constrained by legal laws that both partners can be in a truly reciprocal relationship under both the Doctrine of Right and the Doctrine of Virtue.

The Law of Humanity ties in with the third formulation of the CI (Kingdom of Ends) where everybody’s ends are met. This formulation is the conception of a rational society where every moral agent is in a reciprocal relationship with one another and all ends can be met through respect for the dignity of all rational beings. Further, Kant distinguishes the CI from a hypothetical imperative (HI) where the latter provides guidance for attaining a specified goal, for example, if you desire to have a good job, go to university. But the HI does not command a person to right ethical action.

Kant also prescribes four classifications of moral duties broadly defined as: Duties to

²⁷ See Kant, *Metaphysical Elements of Justice* and Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, in which Kant’s arguments against pre-marital and extramarital sex are in favour of according women the same rights and respect as men. They tie in with his notion that women should be treated equally, explained in greater detail in Kant, *The Science of Right*, where he argues for property and legal rights of women in a marriage under his Doctrine of Right. Critics have argued that this law does not apply anymore given that the times have changed and the status of women is no longer an issue.

self; Duties to others; Perfect duties; Imperfect duties, as a guide for ethical conduct. They are proposed by Kant on how to apply the categorical imperative. In so doing, he delineates between actions arising from inclinations and actions arising from duty. In the following section, I show the four types.

Perfect Duties to Others

Tell the truth

Don't break promises

Don't steal, murder

Perfect Duties to Self

No suicide

No other forms of self-harm

Imperfect Duties to Others

Assist others in need

Help others achieve

Imperfect Duties to Self

Develop one's talents

The perfect duty to others for telling the truth, for example, means one must never lie which is tied to the categorical imperative. The CI binds us to always tell the truth, regardless of circumstances. The perfect duties are therefore morally binding because they are based on reason. Likewise, Kant forbids suicide according to the perfect duty to self because it means using oneself as a mere means which is degrading one's own humanity, according to the second formulation of the CI. Moreover, suicide cannot be generalized to everyone else under the first formulation because there will be no one left if people die.

On the imperfect duty to self, regarding one's talents, Kant regards it as a moral duty for self-perfection (*Ethical Philosophy* 108). As an example, if I have the talent and means to be a doctor, then it is my duty to do so to create a universalizable rule so that help is also available to me when I need it. This is because the universal rule requires others to perfect their own talent as well.

Utilitarianism

J. S. Mill's treatise, *Utilitarianism* sets out the Principle of Utility and the Principle of Happiness as guiding moral standards for a person to evaluate if an action is morally right. They do not have a set of procedures as in the Kantian principles. Mill proportions the idea of duty (right action) in terms of the promotion of happiness.²⁸ The emphasis is on actions and their consequences, without regard for the moral worth of agents although it distinguishes between actions and moral worth. Here, as in Kant, the 'ought' implies 'can'.

It is useful to outline here the two strands of Utilitarianism. Direct (Rule) Utilitarianism and Indirect (Act) Utilitarianism are general theories for assessing moral action. The latter refers to an assessment in proportion to the value of its consequences for general happiness. The former, on the other hand, does not consider the value of consequences for happiness, but through conforming to norms or motives that would have optimal acceptance.

Rule Utilitarianism evaluates a *morally obligatory* act as right insofar as it conforms to a rule which promotes greatest happiness is at least as great as an alternative rule possible for a moral agent to perform. Applying this rule is morally acceptable when a moral agent lacks sufficient information or when time is of the essence. For instance, in the decision of killing Bella's foetus in *Breaking Dawn* part 1, the wolves lacked information on whether the foetus will be a vampire if it is born. Since the foetus is growing exponentially, they have to act immediately or it might feed on humans indiscriminately when it is born. They made the decision based on information that all vampire children lack the instinct to curb their bloodlust as the Cullens were unsure since the conception of a foetus by a vampire and a

²⁸ Mill's notion of duty simply means the right ethical action. It is not synonymous with the Kantian conception of duty.

woman was thought to be impossible. However, in order to kill it, Bella would also be killed in the process. In this respect, an action can be performed even if by doing so results in a less than best outcome provided it is optimal. Thus, it argues for the greatest good for the greatest number of people following a set of prescribed rules, such as those within a society. This leads some observers to associate it closely with the deontological approach because it means adherence to certain precepts according to societal pressures.

Act Utilitarianism evaluates the rightness of an act based on whether the consequences for the general happiness are at least equivalent for the moral agent. Mill states: “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (186); the utility or happiness [should be] ... the directive rule of human conduct” (189). Put in another way, a person’s action could still be morally right if one does not adhere to moral precepts such as honesty and nonmaleficence, because action is assessed based on the best possible consequence. The two maxims are therefore concerned with maximising the best available action while taking into account some acts are less or more right than others. For instance, if one lies to a murderer that his intended victim is not hiding in the attic, the act is morally acceptable.²⁹ Hence, it prescribes a code of behaviour with a rationale behind it: do something because it results in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. That being said, Utilitarianism accepts self-sacrifice only as it promotes the general utility although it admits that sacrifice is itself a good:

A sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted. The only self-renunciation which it applauds, is devotion to the happiness, or to some of the means of happiness, of others;

²⁹ For Kant, lying is akin to keeping false promises, so it is morally unacceptable. In this case, lying to the murderer will flout the CI for the Universal Law. If generalized to everyone else, the lie will not be accepted by the would-be murderer because everyone will lie in this situation.

either of mankind collectively, or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind. (194)

Mill appears to endorse act utilitarianism, as it is “the doctrine that utility or happiness is the criterion of right and wrong” (216), because the ends are met without consideration of the means in which they are achieved. In addition, he outlines reasons for using the principle.

But this does not apply to every case, particularly in instances when there are a set of obligations set out within societal norms; hence, the most appropriate might be to apply rule utilitarianism.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

EXCAVATING THE MEDIA: TRADITIONS, THEORIES, AUDIENCES

Media Effects

Audience studies based on the Political Economy model deal with studying the effects on the audience; that is, they are concerned with what texts are doing to the audience (Schramm et al. 4). Cultural imperialism, rooted in the political economy model, refers to either the forced acculturation of a subject population, or to the voluntary embracing of the dominant (foreign) culture by the receiving cultures via the various channels of communication through the media. The latter alludes to the receiving culture as passively absorbing the foreign culture through the use of its goods and services which suggest a hypodermic needle effect of transmitting values or promoting a particular way of life (Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* 281). In this regard, the audience is assumed to be passive, accepting whatever messages the media is transmitting.

The concerns in effects studies are that of passive consumption and the notion of defenseless audiences. The effects theory is a linear process involving sender, channel, message, receiver and a context in which communication occurs. Thompson defines communication as “the institutionalized production and generalized diffusion of symbolic goods via the fixation and transmission of information or symbolic content” (26). The effects theory suggests that the sender dominates the whole communication process, so the receiver is influenced by the content upon receipt of the transmission of message from the media.

Two-Step Flow

Within effects studies, however, some of the audience, for instance, radio listeners are also posited to have a more active role in the communication process, as media effects are perceived to be “weak, delayed and indirect” (Schrøder et al. 36). In 1955, Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld suggest in their book, *Personal Influence*, that individuals (opinion leaders) are quite influential in getting others to change their attitudes and behaviors through the mass media’s influence on the decision-making of the individual (opinion leader). The researchers term this process as two-step flow. This is because “ideas, often, seem to flow *from* radio and print *to* opinion leaders and *from them* to the less active sections of the population” (32). Thus, the term ‘personal influence’ refers to the process intervening between the media’s direct message and the audience’s ultimate reaction to that message. The two-step flow focused more on audience activities rather than passive absorption.

Cultivation Effects

In the 1970s, various studies focused on viewing violence among television viewers. As George Gerbner et al. found, the media’s cumulative effect amplifies the cultivation of a certain set of beliefs or attitudes about the world (193-4)³⁰. What is significant is that Gerbner’s studies illustrated that watching violence is not a direct cause of aggressive behaviour; rather, it can reinforce messages about law and order, which leads people to submit to leaders who can alleviate the fear. For instance, the US series, *Law and Order* could reinforce a faith in the justice system that perpetrators will get caught for their crimes. Thus, according to “cultivation theory”, audiences may unknowingly absorb messages and images

³⁰ Refer to “Cultural indicators: violence profile no. 9”

in the mass media which resonate with the lived realities of audiences (18).³¹ The cultivation theory emphasises effects on attitudes which cultivates attitudes and values that are already present in a culture and the media just propagates these values, especially for heavy users of television. However, the links between them have not been conclusive.

Michael Moore's documentary, *Bowling for Columbine*, also questions the possible links between media violence, Constitutional Rights, and gun laws in the aftermath of the shooting carnage in Littleton, Colorado in 1999. Moore suggests that the culture of fear perpetuated by the media causes Americans to obtain firearms for self-defense but easy procurement enabled the teenaged shooters to use them on their schoolmates. Questions remain why two teenagers from affluent families would commit the acts of violence; although, the documentary suggests it is the American culture of using force with its massive store of armaments to protect American interests in other parts of the world that has bred a culture of aggression.

Spiral of Silence

Similarly, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's assumptions about the social influences on human behavior are centered on the idea that the mass media may have a decisive influence on the formation of public opinion, particularly issues with a moral element, such as abortion, euthanasia, or homosexuality. If the media, in a cumulative fashion, repeatedly promulgate widely held views, Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence theory suggests that people will remain silent when they feel that their views are in the minority due to the pressure that their alternative views might isolate them from the opinions of the majority. Both this and the Cultivation theory, however, have different effects on the communication

³¹ Refer to "The 'Mainstreaming' of America: Violence Profile No. 11."

process for audiences within “macro [political and economic spheres], mezzo [communities], and micro [lived experience/private lifeworld]” contexts (Jensen and Rosengren 213).

Uses and Gratifications

By the late 1960s and 1970s, Elihu Katz, building on earlier work with Paul Lazarsfeld, suggests that audience research should focus more on what people do with the media, which is contrary to the effects theory. Studies based on the Uses and Gratifications strategy demonstrate that audiences have control over what they watch and are not necessarily influenced by the messages. This suggests an active audience who use the media due to the motivation to assuage certain social and psychological needs as well as gratification motives which determine their selection of content and programme choice. Schramm et al. investigated how children used television content and found that effects are reinforced or diminished according to the social context of the viewer (169). But Katz and Foulkes however, found it difficult to distinguish uses and effects from content (383). Others explored the activity of fans and ‘cult’ viewers with widely divergent gratifications from the meanings produced by the other viewers or the producers of the texts.³²

With the Uses and Gratifications theory, Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz conducted a cross-cultural study on *Dallas* audiences (205-6). They found different types of “moral opposition” to the content while audiences’ awareness that the episodes were manipulative in the construction of messages were met with “ideological opposition”. They argued that these oppositions to the text reflected the critical abilities of the viewers although the viewers’ responses were inferred to have been influenced by the texts. Through focus groups, Liebes and Katz evaluated the critical responses and found viewers acted out alternatives to their usual perceptions in their social interaction with the episodes. It was posited that the

³² See Hills, *Fan Cultures*; Jenkins, “Reception Theory and Audience Research.”

American group was more aware of the difference between babies for the function of the story and their appearance on screen due to more experiences of television genres and the production processes than other western groups. The study found that Moroccan viewers judged the values of the characters through their own values “to evaluate or censure” according to their gendered perception of rights in regards to custody of Sue Ellen’s baby (286). The researchers found that “moral opposition” to the episodes meant viewers accept the content (message) and those who had “ideological opposition” to the texts meant viewers were aware of the “manipulative construction” of the text (219). What is significant about the study is the various decodings by the four different groups within Israeli society (Israeli Russians, Arab citizens of Israel, Moroccan Jews, and kibbutz members who are mostly Israeli-born), second-generation Americans in Los Angeles, and Japanese in Japan. With the findings, the researchers illustrated that interpretations were context-dependent thereby rejecting the cultural imperialism thesis in understanding viewers’ responses.

Political Economy and Cultural Studies

The Political Economy model does not lend much weight to the consumption and the study of the media as David Hesmondhalgh notes in *Cultural Industries*. It neglects texts, discourses and the “viewing practices” of the audience (Allor 221). Taking a moderate view in his book, *The Political Economy of Communication*, Vincent Mosco, however, claims that the political economy model attempts to decentre the media. Since both product and communication are in a social relationship through the communication exchange (66-67), he argues that the incorporation of agency, social processes and social practice with the analysis of structures in the industry is compatible (231-2). This means that in the communication process, multiple, dynamic interactions are possible, instead of the linear causality that often characterizes the model. Hence, Mosco defines the political economy model as “the study of

control and survival in social life,” particularly power relations. They mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources (25) where the interconnections of structure (the communications industry) and action are understood to reproduce social life (212).

In his 1995 critical study on audiences in Norway, utilizing the political economy approach, Jostein Gripsrud studied the cultural significance of the US soap opera *Dynasty*. He traced the production context of the series with an analysis of its textual elements, the distribution processes in Norway, drawing on a wide range of theories that found a multitude of meanings in audience reception. The study found that *Dynasty* shared elements from both drama and melodrama with multiple modes of address which engaged the Norwegian audience on all levels of identification with the characters and situations (226-7). More importantly, Gripsrud argues, the study on audiences should “consider the (whole) social context, the qualitative dimensions of the media texts themselves (7) when studying audience reception, as he found the series was “both a sign of a historical shift in Norwegian broadcasting and . . . also an instrument for change” (105). As Hesmondhalgh asserts, production and consumption should not be seen as separate entities; rather, there are important links between production and distribution in political and social contexts to the consumption of these media productions. This means the activity of audiences in their interaction with texts, and the representations of ideologies, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality in the cultural studies tradition can fill the gap of effects studies in the Political Economy model. Hence, rather than seeing these two traditions as antagonistic, Political Economy and Cultural Studies are both rooted in neo-Marxism in their approach and are key to the study of media and its impact on society, as Kellner contends in *Rethinking the Frankfurt School: Alternative Legacies of Cultural Critique* (31-59). Both traditions consider the context of the social order in which media is produced and consumed, where ideology,

power and dominance are central to the analysis of media products. Cultural Studies offers an added perspective in studying the effects of media including popular culture by applying sociological theory with the literary analysis of texts.

Textual Analysis

Early work from the Cultural Studies tradition in the 1980s employed literary criticism and semiotics to understand the media which extends to popular culture. Literary work, as in effects studies, takes meaning “to be immanent in content structures” usually from the individual “implied reader” (Jensen and Rosengren 217). Both Wolfgang Iser and Umberto Eco locate the reader of the text in terms of assumptions made by the author. Using phenomenological theories, Iser, on the one hand, relates the interaction between the text and the reader’s imagination or self-awareness, taking into account actual texts and the action involved in responding to the text for the implied reader. However, he posits that the text itself may be open to many interpretations: “As we work out a consistent pattern in the text, we will find our ‘interpretation’ threatened, as it were, by the presence of other possibilities of ‘interpretations’ and so there arise new areas of indeterminacy” (292-3), even though the reader may not be fully aware as he is in the process of excluding them.

On the other hand, Eco distinguishes between closed and open texts, with the closed text assuming that any deviant reading is erroneous except that imposed by the author’s intention; while open texts are intended by the author to have various readings made by the model/ideal reader. The model reader is assumed to be able to use his knowledge acquired in his social-cultural circumstances to read the text. Comparing a literary work to a film, Eco claims the latter has too much indeterminacy and limits the imagination to “aberrant decoding” (8). But fully open texts invite the ‘ideal’ reader to be able to decode according to the various issues in the text, as foreseen by the author (9). Thus, from a textual perspective,

there is the inscribed or implied reader (the ideal reader constructed by the text or imagined by the producers of the text) and the actual reader (who engages with the text or extracting meaning from it). Although Cultural Studies focuses on actual messages in the texts paying attention to “genre ... [and] implied reader positions and associated social uses” (Jensen and Rosengren (217), this is based on the assumption that a text has a preferred reading which the audience is knowledgeable enough to decode.

In semiotics, language which constructs the world and the media are both systems of representations. Ferdinand de Saussure’s work on signifying systems and the differentiation between parole and langue show how codes evolve and change from culture to culture. Perhaps a well-known semiotics analysis is demonstrated in Umberto Eco’s work *The Name of the Rose* which was adapted into film in 1986, where William, the protagonist monk, uses a system of signs to derive meaning in order to solve a murder mystery. Sometimes, the ethics of representation is also questionable. Roland Barthes maintains in *Image, Music, Text* that texts are polysemous and he illustrates how a pasta advertisement could indirectly encourage the reader to reach a false conclusion (“Rhetoric of the Image” 33-51). But the tradition lacks empirical research to investigate how a reader interprets and understand a text which is dependent on their different experiences they bring to understanding the text, thus deriving different meanings from it.

Ideology and Hegemony

Ideology and hegemony provide a frame for understanding how political, social, or religious views are communicated through the media. Antonio Gramsci asserts that hegemony is the process of action which dominant groups or individuals attempt to exert leadership and authority over the people to sway them towards certain views, which are ingrained into the social system. He also emphasises that hegemony is a lived process which is never simply

imposed. Besides the media, ideology is found in our practices, subjectivities, and our identities as well as material institutions which can shift the way people think of themselves as being in the world. This is one of the intersecting points with Cultural Studies. The cultural theorists began their analysis of the media starting from the point of ideology and the notion of culture – the everyday lived experience using the ethnographic approach to study television audiences. Even within a culture or social group, many ideologies can be co-existing and occasionally clashing. According to Louis Althusser, each society has a dominant or ruling class ideology – ideology that is an unconscious force that people live rather than see, and is one which becomes embedded in society shared by almost everyone, a lived world itself. For Cultural Studies, the concept of ideology is of central importance, for dominant ideologies serve to reproduce social relations of domination and subordination. As Kellner asserts, “ideologies of class, for instance, celebrate upper class life and denigrate the working class” while those of gender “promote sexist representations of women, ... Ideologies make inequalities and subordination appear natural and just and thus induce consent to relations of domination” (*Media Culture* 9).

The Encoding/Decoding model

Stuart Hall was the main proponent in employing Cultural Studies with a post-Gramscian position (Staiger, *Media Reception* 78-9), arguing that culture was a site where power is established and social action occur, that hegemony is constantly struggled for and negotiated. Hall applied it to media analysis in the 1970s as he thought audiences have a more active role in decoding messages from the texts according to their social contexts. This is based on the assumption that “active consumers engage in power struggles over meanings with [producers] of the texts” and it was found that subcultures construct different readings in opposition to the dominant culture (Butsch, *The Making of American*

Audiences 283). Rejecting the idea that audiences are passive and effected by media text, Hall became one of the main proponents of reception theory and developed the encoding/decoding model as a response to the linear flow of media effects on audiences. He also opposed the textual analysis based on the assumption that it does not show the relationship between text and audience. Thus, as compared to the encoding/ decoding model, the uses and gratifications approach is limited by the highly individualised responses to texts. The encoding/decoding model theoretically illustrates how a media product is constructed by producers and the decoding process is the way in which an audience interprets it, according to preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings. Hence, the text is not considered to have a fixed message.³³ However, this work was theoretical and others have appropriated Hall's work as a springboard in investigating actual audiences.

Ethnographic Research

Audience studies in the Cultural Studies tradition look at what audiences are doing with texts, interrogating the processes with an integration of everyday social and cultural practices, especially from the 1980s to 1990s. This is in contrast to the idea that audiences are responding to mere stimuli as in the effects theory. In the *Nationwide Audience* project, Morley and Brunson utilized Hall's encoding and decoding model to analyse a current affairs television programme. They used the decoding model to investigate audiences through focus groups. They found audience activity was produced through their interpretations based on their subgroup memberships and between the dominant-hegemonic codes of the text rather than just being imposed upon by the text. Power structures were found to be outside the text which shaped audiences within class, gender, ethnicity, and so on. Power structures were also indicated within the text and media institutions. The findings concurred with Hall's three

³³ See Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*.

types of audience interpretations as stated earlier. In this regard, the *Nationwide* study and Hall's work positioned both audience and text as social structures within relations of power and in specific domestic domains where viewing usually takes place. The ethnographic work from the *Nationwide* project had strong sociological, psychological and anthropological foci but they did not fully explore the lifeworld of the audience. Ien Ang argues that the question for Cultural Studies is not simply "where the power lies with media systems [audiences or producers] but rather how power relations are organized within the heterogeneous practices of media consumption" (*Living Room Wars* 35). But Kellner warns against romanticizing the "active audience" and the assumption that all audiences produce meanings thereby denying media culture of powerful cumulative effects (*Media Culture* 15). In this respect, Hall's dominant readings and oppositional readings of texts have limitations as well as dealing adequately with wider social and economic or policy issues.

In contrast, Ien Ang's study, *Watching Dallas*, makes "linkages to national contexts to sort out responses" through analysing letters from viewers (Staiger, *Media Reception* 86). Ang found viewers used knowledge of the mass culture in the US as a critique of others engaged in the programme while defending their own enjoyment. On the one hand, Grossberg maintains, "media audiences are shifting constellations, located within varying multiple discourses which are never entirely outside of the media discourse themselves" (386); on the other hand, Radway ("Reception Study") emphasise that, instead of one particular circuit of producer, text and audience, people's daily lives must be the point of departure and object of research. For Radway then, the audience is the focus of study as is the case for Fisherkeller's work on young audiences and their favourite television show. Fisherkeller found that contextual analyses were valuable for exploring how people "build a sense of themselves as members of multiple worlds within which mass-produced cultural symbols and learning strategies from television culture symbols" (487) are used in responding to peer dilemmas.

Press and Cole analysed women's responses to television portrayals of abortion through the grounded theory method (153). They argued that the portrayals produced oppositional and resistant readings from the respondents. Interestingly, respondents who endorsed the same opinion category on the questionnaires sometimes had very "different rationales to explain their positions [about abortion] in the interview" (13). This suggests a distancing from the depictions of women from a lower socio-economic class terminating their pregnancies. Thus, the study showed that media discourses can illuminate relations of power and authority between pro and anti-abortion debate, although the researchers did not originally intend to approach the study with power structures in mind. However, by letting the data emerge, they found additional themes that contributed to the importance of social class difference when respondents expressed their opinions about abortion.

Audience and Morality

Audience research has also turned to exploring the relationship between philosophy and narratives. In a study on Swedish university students from religious and non-religious backgrounds, Tomas Axelsson found that movies were used as means of coping with matters of "human virtues and the dignity of what it is to be human ... and other core moral principles" (par. 6). Tonny Krijnen's study explored the audience's use of television narratives which include a consideration of the "motivations and feelings of [the characters]" to reflect on moral issues. However, closed texts which gave the viewers a clear moral message were rejected while viewers appreciated the ones that offered multiple moral perspectives. The *Lord of the Rings* worldwide study found a correlation between the audiences' interpretation and enjoyment of the trilogy as the movies have "characters saturated with morality" which "elicit strong emotion", with audiences in agreement that it

was “deeply affecting” (Barker and Mathijs 72-7). As well, in her research on entertainment preference, Mary Oliver found that in choosing movies featuring human drama, “self-development motivations” strongly featured in the audience’s choice “to see how others think and feel ... selecting films in producing strong emotions” (43). Consequently, the studies illustrate that films with moral elements in open texts were deemed to be enjoyable as they allow the audience to experience what the characters were experiencing. The films also enabled audiences to learn coping strategies in dealing with difficult situations.

FILM AND PHILOSOPHY

Since the late 1990s, several publications have dealt specifically on the moral content in films.³⁴ Joseph Kupfer’s *Visions of Virtue in Popular Film* uses Virtue theory to analyse popular films. He claims that films can prompt an audience to morally reflect on the issues of virtue and vice in certain social contexts. However, he acknowledges that although films depict moral content, for example through the film characters, the films do not necessarily articulate any philosophical arguments or advance particular moral positions.

Conversely, Stephen Mulhall claims that what film does is to allow us to reflect and evaluate views and arguments by philosophers, so film does not merely illustrate or reflect the developed arguments by these philosophers, but we should be thinking about films systematically and evaluating them as “philosophy in action” (4).³⁵

Christopher Falzon’s *Philosophy Goes to the Movies* and Dan Shaw’s *Morality and the Movies: Reading Ethics through Film* illustrate how films can be an introduction

³⁴ In this thesis, I use ethical and moral when authors whom I have quoted expressly use the specific term.

³⁵ Similarly for Read and Goodenough, who argue that that one can watch films and be doing philosophy at the same time. One of the aims of the book is to “advance” philosophy through film (31), in *Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell*.

to Philosophy. Shaw opines that one cannot simply discern philosophical content in films as this form of viewing does not naturally occur to the viewer nor do films naturally present specific philosophical positions. He posits that film can be used as illustrations of particular ethical theories to appraise contemporary moral issues. For instance, Shaw applies the Utilitarian and Deontological approaches to the Joker's social experiment in *The Dark Knight* of the *Batman* series, as a precursor to discussing appropriate ethical conduct in a predicament where passengers and prisoners in each ferry rigged with explosives should detonate the other or both ferries will explode. In this situation, if one reasons in accordance to maximizing utility, the choice would be to detonate the bomb in the ferry carrying prisoners since they would not be of use to society, at least not in the immediate future. In the film, the Joker's experiment failed as passengers and prisoners in both ferries did not detonate. This decision accords with the deontological principle that killing is morally wrong. In this respect, Shaw's illustration that movies can be used to introduce ethics, which can be a valuable resource in learning about ethical theories, to deliberate on issues like abortion and killing, would be closer to Thomas Wartenberg's position in his work, *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy*. Wartenberg submits that film can function as thought experiments in a philosophical context or as illustrations of a complex philosophical theory by "invoking philosophical questions" for the audience (2) which is at odds with Muhall's claim.

In the Joker's experiment, the question of killing, even for an altruistic motive like saving children, and supposedly law abiding citizens, may afford an obvious choice to some. Moreover, the recurring theme of justice in the *Batman* series provokes questions on whether killing is morally justifiable, to what end, and with what effect. In the Joker's experiment, the characters made a moral decision not to kill each other, which coheres to Kupfer's claim that through the characters, the audience may discern ethical content, but the film does not explicitly advance any moral position on killing. The Joker's killing spree as well as Harvey

Dent's justification for revenge may be morally reprehensible but they do not advance any philosophical arguments when juxtaposed with Batman's own struggle for justice. At best, it provokes the audience into establishing an empathetic understanding with Batman. But what Kupfer, Shaw, and Wartenberg propose have cogency, that films can function as visual tapestries to rouse the imagination into thinking ethically about moral choices and resolving moral predicaments, although Wartenberg concedes that not all movies have philosophical resonance and some, for example, spoofs, I might add, none at all. However, it would also be injudicious to surmise that films can always function as means for the audience to reflect philosophically.

For one, some films may have ample philosophical content and in others it may be present but barely discernible or implicit, which may not prompt adequate deliberation. Secondly, an audience may grasp when a character's action is either dubious or sound, but it is highly doubtful if an audience without formal exposure to philosophy can actually discriminate and fathom whether the decision fits a particular philosophical theory.³⁶ Thirdly, an audience's understanding and experience of the philosophical content in films are also dependent on whether the elements in the films provoke a philosophical evaluation. As Wartenberg puts forth, film has the ability to place the spectator in the same position as the characters so there is identification with the character and the choices s/he makes, which in

³⁶ I explored this issue with male PhD students from the Science and Computer Engineering disciplines, who have all watched *The Dark Knight* at some point but have no knowledge of particular ethical theories. The type-written sheet given to discuss among them reads thus: *The Joker has managed to rig explosives on two ferries - one with citizens, the other with criminals. The detonators, we are told, are linked to the other ferry's explosives. This means that if ferry A detonates the bomb, ferry B will explode and vice versa. Each ferry has until midnight to detonate the other's ferry in order to survive or BOTH ferries will be destroyed. Each ferry has to make a choice or the passengers will die. What should each ferry of passengers do?* From the feedback received, if I had not briefly explained the Utilitarian and Kant's ethical principles prior to the discussion, the students would not know how to 'think' according to specific ethical principles even though they understood that one choice was sounder than the other, depending on whom they want to save. Interestingly, students from one culture chose to save the citizens while others from another culture opted to do nothing because it would mean killing people to save lives. Those who chose to detonate the ferry carrying the prisoners said the choice was difficult for them but they thought the prisoners' lives were of lesser use. The moderator for the session thought the responses were culturally conditioned which has implications on how ethical conduct is perceived among different nationalities. The students were from China, India, Vietnam, and Singapore (Chinese). The majority of the students chose to do nothing.

turn prompts the audience to mentally experiment with philosophical solutions. But this solution may be hard pressed for the audience to articulate in terms of a philosophically sound argument. Lastly, an audience may draw heavily on their social-cultural, religious, and, I would argue, educational backgrounds in response to a character's action which may not necessarily cohere to the prescribed philosophical solution presented in the film. Conversely, the film may proffer solutions which an audience could readily accept as the most appropriate ones. Thus, to come to any reasonable understanding about philosophical concerns in films, one has to include the study of actual content and how it is presented in relation to the actual experiences of the audience. In addition, the different and/or similar experiences to the philosophical content among the audience need to be examined. This is especially pertinent when Hollywood cinema continues to dominate screens globally.

PHENOMENOLOGY

From a phenomenological lens, film is a means through which the spectator is able to gaze upon life from a distance while simultaneously experiencing life by way of the camera. One could consider film spectatorship to be a parallel to “the movement from our lived and un-reflected-upon experience of phenomena . . . to our reflection on both the phenomena and our mode of experiencing it” (Sobchack, *Address of the Eye* 36). In other words, the spectator sees a representation of life unfolding on the screen and s/he internalizes those visual images and the various physical and emotional feelings that the images provoke. Drawing on Husserl's phenomenology, Frank Tomasulo points out that our consciousness is an active “[intentional] registration of the world”; hence, Husserl's principle suggests that “phenomenological intuitions are not simple experiences, but complex, highly structured

interpretive (and potentially meaning-producing) acts”(1).³⁷ The Husserlian concept of phenomenology is based on reason as the intuitive grasp of essences and their necessary interconnections toward a kind of moral realism. Phenomenology, broadly construed, describes the experience of what we conceive as ethical conduct.

If a phenomenological reading is an analysis of moral engagement with film, one must consider the ethical content in the texts and responses to it in equal measure, so “[f]ilm [as] its own reality, its own world, and the attention of any possible, conceptual film-being must be theorised as being part of that world, not separate and observational” (Frampton, 46-7).³⁸ Our everyday experience of morality and the filmic experience of morality are mutually dependent. We are directed by our lived experiences, the reality of our life-worlds, to how we experience and understand a filmic moment by the conditioning and shaping of our interpretation of film which makes a certain film *meaningful* to us. In other words, when a film emits a clear resonance to the viewer, the senses are engaged, in what Sobchack terms as “carnal thoughts” that ground and inform more conscious analysis of its filmic content (*Carnal Thoughts* 60). But it is also a dialogic encounter as film reception in turn persuades or modifies our understanding and conduct of our everyday life.

According to Ward Jones, the film “manifests an evaluative attitude toward its own characters, events, or contexts [and] it encourages the spectator through [her] enjoyment to adopt a similar attitude” (4).³⁹ Individuals can only prescribe their judgement of moral

³⁷ See Tomasulo, “Phenomenology.” For Husserl, the method involves a bracketing out of objects of consciousness to focus on the act itself. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, however, claims that the “inventory of consciousness is milieu of the universe” and that subjectivity is always situated in and our engagement with the world (2). This strand of thought informs Sobchack’s work on the phenomenology of film.

³⁸ Daniel Frampton disagrees with Vivian Sobchack on this account in that she regards film as being both the subject and object. For Sobchack, film depends on subjectivity and uses “embodied existence” ... to enact its intentions so film ‘thinks’ through the technical aspects of film such as framing, shots, color, etc...In *Carnal Thoughts*, Sobchack claims that cinema “objectively alters our subjectivity while [inviting] our complicity in formulating space, time, and bodily investment as significant personal and social experience” (136-37). Frampton, however, argues that film does not necessarily mirror the way that our consciousness thinks either visually or aurally.

³⁹ *Ethics at the Cinema*.

actions obtained from their current repertoire of meanings, that is, from their knowledge of morality. In order to do that, the narratives must have some ethical dimensions that are also relevant to one's ethical life. To put it in another way, it is an intersubjective experience, drawing from an "interdependent nature of resources" in the cinema and in one's ethical life to aid one's understanding of film; thus, "narrative structure and sensory experience are implicated ... [which shape] the way moral possibilities, choices, and ... outcomes" are viewed (Stadler, *Pulling Focus* 2). By engaging with the characters, an individual becomes involved in their moral struggles as the film body acts as an extension of the human body to become an embodied experience, although it is not a wholly immersed experience because "cinema ... transposes, without completely transforming, those modes of being alive and consciously embodied in a world that count[s] for each of us as direct experience" (Sobchack, *Address of the Eye* 4). An encounter with films is therefore ethically significant because the dialogue and narratives function as means to understanding how best to live an ethical life; how to circumvent instances that prompt us to immoral behaviour, and elect instead, to exercise our free will in honouring our moral obligations to others. As Sobchack explains, the cinema "offers our lived-bodies ... different ways of 'being-in-the world' ... [It] implicates us in different structures ... [and] stimulates us to different aesthetic responses and ethical responsibilities" (*Carnal Thoughts* 136). Thus, interactions with films enable individuals to grasp the different philosophical issues in the texts because moral judgement is evaluative. How an individual evaluates the moral actions is also a reflection of his/her own attitudes towards real people in his/her life-world. Likewise, phenomenology also accounts for integrating the new sense data from the films to one's experiential inventory of morality.

Downing and Saxton suggest, "perhaps the most obvious way of thinking about the ethical in film is to consider representations of agents facing ethical dilemmas on screen" (17). I approach this study with the premise that film "directly embodies ethical positions"

and “the diegetic world is apt to construct an ethical framework” (Downing and Saxton 19) that may or may not directly align with an audience’s moral perspectives. It is more in keeping with Frampton’s argument that “the filmgoer’s experiences ... film in ways that the filmic techniques and intentions of the filmmakers cannot completely control or limit” (75).

RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm is a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba 17) and “represent[s] belief systems that attach users to particular worldviews” (Denzin and Lincoln, “Discipline and Practice” 6) which contain ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises (22).⁴⁰ Morality, based on my worldview, is a set of principles that can be applied to reach morally sound decisions, but which principles are applied are dependent on one’s own knowledge and understanding of particular moral theories, which also involves the way individuals relate to morality, make sense and meaning and form personal understandings.

Ontology “relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics” and researchers are involved in the “multiple realities” [as] do the “individuals being studied, [for] reality is subjective as seen through the participants in the study” (Creswell 21). Thus, “many constructions are possible” (Guba 25). Morality is, therefore, a human construction created of understanding as phenomena are interpreted through and shaped by lived experiences such that “at different times and in different places...[there can be] very divergent interpretations of the same phenomena” as they are “historically and culturally effected” (Crotty 64). Lived experience, according to Boylorn, “is a representation and understanding of a researcher or research [participant’s] human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one’s perception of knowledge are....shaped by ... race... religion, and other roles

⁴⁰ Thomas Kuhn first defined paradigm as an “entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on, shared by the members of a given community” (175) but there are always “competing schools...each constantly questions the foundations of others” (162-163).

and characteristics [which] lead to a self-awareness that...can respond to larger public and social themes, [that] also offers a perspective through which to make comparisons for research” (490). As Crotty explains, it is through “humans engaging with the world... that meaning is born” (45), and it is “the *mélange* of cultures and sub-cultures into which we are born [that] provides us with meanings. These meanings we are taught and we learn...in a process of enculturation, they establish ...and shape our thinking and behavior throughout our lives (79).⁴¹ This research is concerned with individuals’ moral perspectives through investigating what meanings are constructed specifically for two key issues, infidelity and abortion, so the ontological assumption in this study is oriented to a constructivist view.

Epistemology refers to the relationship between the inquirer and the known and the nature of knowledge is subjectivism. This position underlies the research process and governs the interpretivist perspective. Morality is therefore interpretive based on an epistemological assumption as multiple “knowledges” can coexist since knowledge consists of various constructions of morality (Guba and Lincoln, “Competing Paradigms” 113). In the context of this study, individuals construct their own subjective knowledge of morality influenced by their prior understandings of it. Thus, the intent of the researcher is to grasp the individual’s “definition of a situation” (Schwandt 118); for instance, when encountering moral predicaments related to infidelity and abortion as experienced in the films. Determining an audience’s moral perspectives in this research involves focusing on the “meaning-making activity of the individual” (Crotty 58), and “describes the individual human subject engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them” (79). The individual watching the same film with another in the same audience may have diverse experiences of and differing

⁴¹ Michael Crotty defines this as “constructionism”, differentiating it from constructivism (79). He claims that phenomenology is constructivist in that objects are presented to us and we attach meaning. But he uses the term “constructionist” when we are encultured to think in such a way about a phenomenon.

perceptions on what is appropriate moral conduct regarding the moral predicaments portrayed in the films. So the researcher needs to make sense of, interpret, and understand evidence through the individual's unique experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 3; Wimmer and Dominick 115-118) and thus obtain knowledge of individual moral perspectives. However, the knowledge gained from the proceedings of the enquiry is also "a human construction, never certifiable as ultimate truth or falsity" (Guba 26) since the individuals in the study are actively involved.

The ontological assumption that morality is constructed is related to the epistemological view of knowledge through an interpretative analysis of individual subjectively described film experiences of the moral content in films (Denzin and Lincoln 12). Decisions on methods of data collection take into account the individual interpretations, the contexts, the phenomena under investigation, and the researcher also "spends time [viewing the films] with participants" (Creswell 17-22).

The purpose of this reflection is to become aware of my assumptions in order to keep them in mind so as to avoid imposing them and be able to engage in the study without preconceived notions about what will be found in the research process, in order to strive for objectivity in the observations of the data (Leedy and Ormrod 139). I am cognizant of my own assumptions of morality yet at the same time; individual perspectives are allowed to emerge to form a coherent description of their worldviews without intervention from me in my research. As Guba and Lincoln assert, "paradigm issues are crucial" to the research and the researcher must be "clear about just what paradigm informs and guides" the approach ("Competing Paradigms" 116). To mitigate the risk of researcher's bias, the researcher's positionality could not be articulated and a method of data collection was needed whereby audiences were free to explore and express their perspectives without judgement. This meant that all data collected had to be included, with a method of analysis for studying the moral

content in the films and the audience's experiences in a credible and dependable way.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy subsumes both exploratory and descriptive to address the research aim; explore the moral perspectives of the Singaporean film audience on moral issues; specifically, infidelity and abortion with a view to interpreting the phenomena in terms of appropriate moral conduct that the audience ascribes to them through the context of their film experiences. As Silverman asserts, if the aim of the research is too broad with too many aspects of phenomena, there is the risk of not achieving desired depth (86).

The objectives of this research are: (1) explicate data sets from both the films and audience which will be synthesized to establish audience associations/dissociations with or ambivalence to the moral content; (2) data sets from the audience will be extracted in order to investigate if correlation points exist among moral perspectives; (3) data sets will be extracted from the audience detailing the extent the films, educational, religious, and socio-cultural/familial factors guide the moral perspectives.

An exploratory design is appropriate as it aims at providing initial insights (Leedy and Ormrod 140) and "better understanding" (Babbie 90), when very little is known of the moral perspectives on infidelity and abortion and the possible influences of Hollywood films on Singaporean audiences. Thus, I enter the research with a curiosity from the point of not knowing and to provide new data regarding phenomena in a particular context (Creswell, *Research Design* 145). It also allows for flexibility to pursue lines of inquiry as needed; for instance, when the audience broaches other moral issues that are not within the research parameters but which may identify salient factors that afford a deeper insight into their moral perspectives that may elucidate on particular dominant moral orientations. As well, there is

scant existing research on investigating the moral content in Hollywood films especially with regard to specific moral theories in relation to audience reception of them. Thus, there is no pre-planned design for analysis until the data is collected so it takes on an emic perspective where the researcher focuses on individual views, meanings and interpretations in the enquiry. As Mayring explains, an explorative design enables the formulation of new categories out of the data which is inductive (12). The design uses non-probability or purposive sampling strategy for both the films and the audience.

A descriptive strategy can reveal the multilayered and complex nature of certain relationships, people and certain situations (Leedy and Ormrod 140). It is based on observation and then detailing the characteristics of the moral perspectives among the audience in the context of their backgrounds. It, therefore, aims at providing an accurate and credible representation by encapsulating the factors that pertain to the audience's perspectives and finding the interconnections between individual perspectives in relation to the moral content in the films. Additionally, it observes the characteristics of the moral predicaments in each film and reports the number of times each of the moral theories is explicitly expressed or inferred which has the potential to influence the audience's perspectives to the film's moral position on moral issues and its dominant moral orientation. Following Mayring, the design entails working through the data with a deductive system where categories are preset so the researcher finds the occurrences of those categories in category frequencies (12). Thus, it utilizes a pre-planned analysis structured on Aristotelian virtue ethics, Kantian ethics and Mill's utilitarianism.

The exploratory/descriptive design will generate primary data through probing the audience on their moral perspectives and to analyse existing data in the form of the films. The analytical process involves both moral theories and emerging relevant indicators generated by the data from the audience. The research applies inductive reasoning which

requires “insight and reflection” that begins with observation of the data from the films and audience and proceeds to “search for patterns out of [the] body of observations” (Babbie 76) and “draw conclusions” about the film’s moral orientation and the audience’s moral perspectives (Leedy and Ormrod 18-19). A qualitative methodology is, therefore, most suited to this type of research design.

CHAPTER THREE: Qualitative Methodology

MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

As an undergraduate majoring in Communications Studies and English Language and minoring in Sociology, the study of the various communication approaches on media effects, from Marshall McLuhan's proposition "the medium is the message" to Herbert Schiller's conception of cultural imperialism and Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model, helped contextualize for me the possible influences of the media and the ways in which an audience responds to or negotiates meaning within the media in different socio-cultural milieus.⁴²

Knowledge of the plethora of theories while constructive to the development of my proposed film audience research by the time I graduated, however, seemed unsatisfactory as the research focus was still shrouded in fog, even as I continued to evaluate films from a range of genres. A confluence of later events shaped my final proposed topic.

A spate of reports on local public figures whose extra marital affairs were exposed stirred debates on infidelity among the Singaporean public around the time that I began research. This led to questions about what infidelity means to people and what shapes their acceptance of or objection to it. I searched for official figures of infidelity which coincidentally led to the discovery of the high abortion rate among the graduate population. The latter is significant as the government had endeavoured to increase the birth rate unsuccessfully for decades, particularly encouraging graduates to have more children at one point.⁴³ The abortion issue registered strongly with me as I recall watching an educational video in secondary school on abortion through the various means, interspersed with images of

⁴²See McLuhan, *Understanding Media*; Schiller, *Communication and Cultural Domination*; Hall, *Encoding and Decoding*.

⁴³See Chua and Chang on selective breeding.

the foetus struggling while being torn apart. Because of my early education in a convent school, I interpreted abortion as an act of killing a human and that the public disapproval of infidelity was based on religious grounds. But that did not account for the objections of those unaffiliated with any religion. By the time I was about to enter graduate school, I had delved into moral philosophy which I thought would afford means to a better understanding of the phenomena. Film and Philosophy was also gaining traction among the scholarly community which refined the research foci to investigating moral issues in films, specifically infidelity and abortion, within a moral framework, in relation to the audience's moral perspectives on appropriate moral conduct. As a novice researcher without formal training in philosophy and research methodologies, I took on additional graduate courses in both and participated in the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

RESEARCHER'S POSITIONALITY

My educational training and background have a bearing on the credibility of the current study. It is commonly acknowledged there are axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions which researchers incorporate in the research process (Creswell 15-22; Denzin and Lincoln, "Paradigms and Perspectives" 183) for qualitative research. As I am involved in the research and decision-making with regards to the data collection, from an axiological point of view, I have to be aware of my own beliefs, values, and potential bias, to make visible to readers how these may contribute to my own subjectivity when they scrutinize the research process (Patton 700) for "coherent, ethical, and theoretically informed choices" at each stage (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 36). According to Guba and Lincoln, axiology includes "basic beliefs"; also, in some ways "values feed into the inquiry process: choice of problem, choice of paradigm to guide the problems, choice of theoretical framework", data collection and analysis ("Paradigmatic

Controversies” 197). Further, as Wimmer and Dominick contend, the choice of paradigm is based on “axioms, or statements that are universally accepted as true”, related to the researcher’s selection of an appropriate methodology (115).

For these reasons, a sketch of my background is provided. I am of Chinese-Eurasian ethnicity, born and raised a Catholic. I attended weekly mass and Bible classes until I left Singapore. I am cognizant of some Buddhist teachings, performed ancestral worship rites, and participated in Taoist ceremonies and Hindu religious sessions because of my Chinese and Indian relatives. Through Singapore’s ethnic integration policy regarding housing estates, I have an understanding of some Islamic beliefs from Muslims residing in the same neighbourhood. The exposure to various religious beliefs did not shed any light on infidelity for me however, although I accepted that abortion is forbidden according to my religion and considered unthinkable by my social and familial circles. My perspectives are further shaped by my time abroad, living in a predominantly Caucasian neighbourhood in Kitsilano where I was invited to participate in the summer solstice and sweat lodge ceremonies in my neighbour’s backyard and elsewhere. These deepened my spiritual union with nature and influenced my ways of thinking about human existence and interaction with the environment. I was also persuaded by the romantic ideals and extenuating circumstances regarding infidelity portrayed in the Hollywood films that my housemate and I regularly watch. Some of my colleagues led alternative lifestyles and my close friends had unfaithful partners and believed in cohabitation rather than marriage. None in my social circle, I might add, adhere to any organized forms of religious tenets, although I became more devout at some intervals due to my ties to the congregation at church. These experiences abroad had adjusted the lenses through which I view morality. Nonetheless, in graduate school reading Philosophy, I find that my moral perspective of infidelity has decidedly Kantian overtones even though my perspective on abortion is based on the Catholic faith. As Denzin and Lincoln maintain,

perspectives “are not as solidified..., although a perspective may share ...for example, a common set of methodological assumptions or a particular epistemology” (“Paradigms and Perspectives” 183). My education, social and familial networks, spiritual and religious experiences had modified my worldview at different moments in my life. My own lived experience, therefore, informs the ontological and epistemological assumptions that form the “philosophical basis” of this study (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 4).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methodology is “interpretive” (Creswell 25), based on studying “the topic within its context...works with particulars... and describes in detail the context of the study” (21). It is the most appropriate when there is little existing research on the phenomena. It is used to identify how meaning is constructed (Denzin and Lincoln 3; Wimmer and Dominick 115) in what the audience articulates in their different knowledge, and “viewpoints and practices” (Flick 6), in what they think, through exploring the audience’s lives, behavior and interactions, emphasising lived experiences. It is based on an interactive research process involving both the researcher and the participants which permeates the research process (Flick 6). Hence, the researcher examines the film experiences of the audience from their perspectives in order to interpret the meanings once the researcher is immersed in the data. This qualitative methodology is the rationale that determines the approaches and methods to be adopted within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm.

This research employs content analysis, one of the qualitative approaches (Leedy and Ormond 148-149), to assess individual moral perspectives and the moral predicaments in the films within the moral framework employed in this study. The content is analysed on two levels: descriptive and interpretative. The phenomena being studied are issues depicted

through the moral predicaments and their resolutions, as subjectively experienced by individuals watching the films. Because morality is viewed as a construct and perceptions are based on individual views within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, utilizing a phenomenological lens in this research is not incommensurable with content analysis and can be an integral part of data analysis (Leedy and Ormrod 148) as the paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation (Creswell 25).

Phenomenology

In the most general sense, phenomenology is the study of phenomena as they appear in our experiences. One of the elements in this study is to understand the audience's direct and immediate engagement (Crotty 79) with the moral issues in film which allows the researcher to bring to the fore, a description of what audiences "have in common as they experience the phenomena" (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 76). Our everyday experience of morality and the filmic experience of morality are mutually dependent. We are directed by our lived experiences, the reality of our life-worlds, to how we experience and understand a filmic moment by the conditioning and shaping of our interpretation of film which makes a certain film *meaningful* to us. Hence, the phenomenological approach to film is an effective tool for examining what meanings are ascribed to the phenomena as experienced from a first-person point of view that "reflect various aspects of the [film] experience" (Leedy and Ormrod 150).⁴⁴

As Stadler asserts, both the narratives and "sensory experience" are implicated in an individual's "ethical understanding" which shapes the ways "moral possibilities, choices, and potential outcomes" in the films are viewed (2). Further, as Robert Sinnerbrink puts forward, "the depiction of ethical experience within narrative film is aimed at eliciting an

⁴⁴ Morality is a construct that is observed in its "manifestations" according to Wimmer and Dominick who offer distinctions to the concept (43).

ethical response from the view but also raises questions ... about the filmmakers' and viewers' relationships with the image" (20). Viewed through a phenomenological lens, scenes which contribute to the most meaningful experiences of the individuals in this study are assessed to determine how the cinematic techniques contribute to the associations of the individuals to the moral content in the films. The cinematic techniques in which film utilizes to communicate its position on the moral issues are analysed through the cinematography, specifically, dialogue and action in scenes which individuals find meaningful as these may orientate the audience to the film's dominant moral position which could potentially influence an individual's usual perspective on right or wrong moral actions.

The phenomenological film analyses allow the researcher to explicate the experiences and assess if correlation points exist among them, by evaluating individual experience of film within a variety of socio-cultural, religious, educational contexts, supported by references to the films. This will add to the understanding of individual moral perspectives through the subjective experiences of films since the content analysis approach does not account for different meanings that are ascribed among individuals, and between the researcher and individual (Wimmer and Dominick 159).

Content Analysis

This approach is used to examine the moral perspectives of individuals and the treatments of abortion and infidelity, among other moral issues, in the films, and the extent to which they "reflect and construct" particular moral positions towards these phenomena within the moral framework (Hesse-Biber and Leavy [2nd ed.] 229). It supports a systematic exploration, examination, and description of specific moral content to assess the films' dominant moral orientations and their potentiality for the audience to associate or disassociate

with them. It also focuses on each individual's specific characteristics and aims at identifying commonalities and differences and explaining the contexts in which the differences are based among the individual moral perspectives. Krippendorff defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (24), the objective of which is to link results in the data analysis across data sets. It involves coding of the moral characteristics in the films and from the participants' data which includes "tabulation of the frequency of each characteristic" with a descriptive and inferential analysis of the data (Leedy and Ormrod 150). As Wimmer and Dominick assert, it is not unusual for a researcher using numbers in content analysis within the interpretive paradigm (117) and content analysis can be used in both quantitative and qualitative ways (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 22). In addition, the flexibility of its approach allows the "use [of] observations from the literature of critical scholars" (Neuendorf 102) which can serve as corroborating evidence or counterarguments especially in regard to ethically questionable conduct of the characters and the audience's perspectives.

These two approaches in the methodology were grounded in the application of moral theories, centered on Aristotelian virtue ethics, Kantian moral philosophy, and Millian utilitarianism, to evaluate the moral content of the narratives and the moral perspectives of the individuals in the study. Character traits according to Aristotle's virtue ethics and morally right actions that aligned with the moral theories of Kant and Mill were assessed. Negative associations were not evaluated, since they point to particular traits or actions which are deemed morally undesirable or impermissible according to the specific philosophies in the framework. What is considered morally wrong in the Kantian sense may be morally acceptable according to Mill since both moral philosophies evaluate moral actions differently. The purpose of this study is to understand from the participants' perspectives, what they

deem to be morally wrong conduct in relation to the moral issues and what they consider as right acceptable actions within the moral framework.

Research Questions

The underlying research is based on the set of ontological and epistemological assumptions discussed previously in Chapter Three, regarding the researcher's "notion of reality" and "the determination of [the] research question[s] is linked to "the researcher's ethical values" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy [2nd ed.] 41). In tandem with the research strategy, my research questions were both exploratory and descriptive to understand individual responses to the films and with each other in making sense of their film experiences on specific moral issues located in the films and the interconnections between their moral perspectives.

RQ 1: What moral theories are present in each film?

RQ 1a: What is the dominant moral orientation of each film?

RQ 2: How do the films engage the audience?

RQ 3: What are the associations/dissociations with morality in the films?

RQ 4: What are the audiences' perspectives on moral issues?

RQ 4a: How does the audience associate/disassociate with each other in making sense of the moral issues?

Research Procedures

This section describes the research procedures for the current study approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in July 2017 at Nanyang Technological University Singapore (NTU). I provide an outline of the research site and discuss issues related to

gaining access. Then I give an account of the sampling strategies for the research, followed by ethical considerations for this study. Finally, I detail the methods of data collection and analysis.

Research Site

The main campus at NTU, where the researcher is based, was the site for the recruitment of participants and the data collection.⁴⁶ The locations of the counselling and wellness centres on the main campus afford easy accessibility should the immediate need arise for the participants to be referred to their services during the data collection. The site selection was also due to the wide range of possible venues that could be used in the data collection phase. I decided on NTU as a single site for the study because the university holds a diversity of cultures and religious affiliations which were integral to my study as Singapore is a multiracial and multi-religious society. Individual schedules would also be easier to coordinate as I was familiar with the semesters/trimesters and their vacation periods. Since about 38% of Singaporean undergraduates also live on campus, recruiting from this site would eradicate the need for their commute. It could take up to two hours of travel each way to NTU on the public transportation system depending on where one resides. The participants' familiarity with the campus and its venues meant unnecessary delays could be

⁴⁶ NTU comprises several schools with its own divisions within each of the colleges of: Business (NBS); Engineering; Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS); Professional and Continuing Education (PaCE); Science. In addition, there are the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCSOM), set up jointly with Imperial College London, which operates out of the Novena and main campuses, and the Interdisciplinary Graduate School (IGS) where its PhD students are attached to different centres/schools affiliated to IGS depending on their research foci. There are other centres; for instance, the SAF-NTU Academy for military personnel and the Communication Cube, which is part of the Language and Communication Centre (LCC), with peer coaches assisting students with their writing and presentation skills. NTU also consists of autonomous institutes such as the National Institute of Education (NIE) for trainee and postgraduate teachers, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Earth Observatory of Singapore, and the Centre on Environmental Life Sciences and Engineering (CELSE). Each division has its own administration and each school has offices that oversee its graduates, undergraduates, and research matters. Other centres at NTU were not contacted because these are primarily research clusters where their personnel are working professionals or researchers. Students attached to these clusters would be from individual schools within the specific colleges at NTU. There are also various student unions and clubs that cater to arts and culture, academic, religious, and special interests groups at NTU. Altogether, there are eight subject libraries in the main campus, one at Novena and one in NIE.

avoided during the data collection phase even if some of the (under)graduates live off campus.

Enrollment for the 2017/18 academic year was 23,753 full-time and part-time undergraduates and 7636 graduates (Nanyang Technological University). From the large pool of Singaporean undergraduates, perspectives on abortion, before they graduate, would be pertinent to the research. It would be important to know if they had already formed concrete notions of abortion as an option for an unwanted pregnancy, due to the high abortion rate among graduates in Singapore. Thus, from a single site, I could recruit participants from the various disciplines to ensure a mix of perspectives.

Process

The recruitment started on 30th July and ended on 9th August 2017. The research was approved for recruiting the participants through email correspondence. The decision to use email was because it was instantaneous and convenient to forward, which also enabled me to keep track of respondents. Prior to submitting the document to the IRB for approval, I had shown a number of email subject headers to students at NTU for their opinion on which would be more likely to be opened and read as I did not want the email to be deleted before being opened. A vast majority had opted for the header titled “Seeking Your Perspectives on Hollywood Films” as the one most likely to pique the curiosity of the email recipient and to be opened and read.

Incentive

The participants were required to watch five films and fill out a questionnaire immediately at the end of each film and attend a personal interview later. Informal questions were posed to the Singaporean (under)graduates from different schools to determine a

suitable incentive for the participants in this study. Since the goal was to obtain an amount of money reflective of how the participants feel adequately compensated for time and the amount of work, questions were thus posed to those acquainted with the researcher to understand the rationale for the figures given. This also generated discussions among some individuals. Some pegged it to part-time work at a fast food chain while others compared it to work available on campus for which they are paid or research conducted in their respective schools. The range of incentive that they considered suitable for the entire study was \$30 - \$100, with most agreeing that \$50 - \$75 was fair. Thus, the amount was derived by the following calculation: \$10 per film including completing the questionnaire at the end and \$15 for the interview, which equals to a total of \$65 for each individual participating in the study.

Access

I had earlier identified the various administrative offices to which I would request assistance to recruit participants before I received the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, so that I might immediately send out the email once I received it. Initially the study was planned for the semester break in December 2016 but approval was given in July 2017, a month before the start of the Academic Year 2017/2018 semester 1 so there were modifications to the originally planned venues and urgency to start data collection before classes actually began. Moreover, matriculation for (under)graduates is typically in August, which is a time when various orientation activities take place for the incoming freshmen and also when students select their courses for the semester. Thus, the recruitment had to be done in 10 days to minimise conflicts with the participants' schedules. Once the venues, dates and times for the data collection were confirmed, I sent out the recruitment email on 30th July. The data collection period for the film viewings was also shortened from five to two days to

prevent disruption to participants' classes. Verbal approval was given by the IRB for this amendment.

Requests to disseminate the email to the (under)graduate population for recruiting purposes were sent via my NTU email account so I could be easily identified as a bona fide NTU postgraduate conducting research. A short explanatory note to the recipients that accompanied the attachment of the IRB approved Participation Information and Recruitment Email document (see Appendix A) were sent to student clubs, personal contacts at NTU, and administrations of the schools in the colleges, centres, and autonomous institutes. This note varied in tone; where it was addressed to the student clubs or students in specific schools, I appealed from the position of a fellow student, communicating the urgency to recruit and collect data for the research to fulfil the requirements of the higher degree. The note was formal when requesting assistance from the schools' administration with the offer to attach the NTU-IRB approval letter, as proof that the research is officially sanctioned, when addressed to autonomous institutes.

Issues related to the recruitment phase

Although the IRB approval came from NTU, it did not automatically grant me access to its student population. There were no email rights to the list of (under)graduates in the researcher's own division or school; hence, mass emails could not be sent out. The rights, for instance, are limited to the Graduate Students' Committee (GSC) in the respective schools whose student members have access to the master list, to the members of the various student clubs, and to administrations of the different divisions and faculty. Hence, I also contacted those graduate students whose email addresses were accessible in some colleges, some of whom pointed me to specific people who could assist in their respective schools. I also found that not all schools have a system in place for handling requests such as mine, which resulted

in delays as my email was channelled among the various personnel. A few did not reply promptly as they were on leave and time was spent tracking down their replacements that could disseminate the information. Some did not respond, others assisted immediately, some asked for more information, yet others denied my request.

Responses

Although the recruitment process was riddled with obstacles in some situations as stated in the previous section, there were also very prompt actions regarding my appeal and I was always informed when my email was disseminated. In almost all cases, there were immediate responses from students or within the first two hours after they had received the recruitment information from their respective schools and clubs. This afforded the opportunity for me to gauge whether my recruitment strategy was effective and whether my recruitment email was actually sent out based on the responses I had received. In some cases, students would have received information about the study more than once depending on their associations at NTU.

Purposive Sampling of Participants

Selecting participants from a single site meant all the demographic details could also be easily identified and relevant data sources could be obtained. The site also offered the possibility of exploring whether course(s) on morality that the participants across disciplines may have read could have contributed to their perspectives on appropriate moral actions when faced with their own moral predicaments. Thus, the sampling for the participants was selected purposefully to yield “useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton 46), the logic of which was to illuminate “*information-rich cases*” for the study (264). This type of sampling is to gain in-depth insight about the moral perspectives of frequent film

viewers at NTU and not aimed at generalizing to the general population.

The criteria for my sample were that participants must: (1) watch English language movies at least once a month; (2) be between 19-39 years old; (3) be born in Singapore; (4) complete a minimum of 12 years primary, secondary, and post-secondary education in Singapore. I did not specify that the movies had to be Hollywood productions because respondents may have different ideas on what constitutes a Hollywood film.

Criteria 1 and 2 are on the basis of congruity to frequent film viewers between the ages of 18-24 and 25-39 as defined by the MPAA. I restricted films to English language ones because these dominate Hollywood productions which also make up the majority of films in Singapore. As undergraduate enrolment begins at 19 for females if they have completed 12 years in the educational system, I used this figure as the minimum age for recruiting.⁴⁷ The males would have to complete two years of mandatory National Service (NS), typically after their post-secondary education or at age 18 depending on whether they had attended a junior college, institute of technical education, or polytechnic before NS; hence, their entry to university would usually be about 20-21 years old.⁴⁸

I defined Singaporean as one who fulfils criteria three and four because an individual would then have been living in Singapore for a considerable amount of time for socio-cultural and religious factors in the Singapore context to have a possible influence. Thus, I excluded those who were born overseas, even if both parents are Singaporeans, as it would not be possible to compare different socio-cultural contexts and to determine factors in these contexts which may have a bearing on perspectives, in their time spent overseas

⁴⁷ The Ministry of Education Singapore implements changes to its educational system periodically. Depending on when a person is born, and which system was applicable when one started school and whether one retained a year in the same standard, a person could have more than 12 years of education in the Singapore system. The polytechnic or ITE route is three years while education in junior colleges would take two years. In addition, Singapore also offers the International Baccalaureate, which is a six year post primary programme. For more information, see National Library Board, "New Education System (NES) is introduced; Ministry of Education, "Integrated Programmes (IP).

⁴⁸ Mandatory conscription for citizens, permanent residents, or those born in Singapore.

between birth and the commencement of their education in Singapore. Likewise, I did not include individuals who are naturalised citizens. Since Singapore does not automatically grant citizenship at birth unless certain conditions are fulfilled, criterion three was to ensure at least one parent of the individual is a Singaporean who may have shaped an individual's perspectives. Criterion four was a stipulation because I considered educational background; in particular, moral education received in Singapore schools, an aspect that may have played a role in one's moral outlook. For this criterion, any school that an individual had attended, including religious ones, were acceptable so long as the education is recognised by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore.

In qualitative research, purposive sample sizes differ and there is no consensus on the actual size (Guest et al. 48). The sample sizes are generally “small” in qualitative research and the type of purposive sample takes into account the research questions and the resources available to the researcher (Hesse-Biber and Leavy [2nd ed.] 45). However, too small a target sample would also be counter-intuitive due to the number of religious categories as recorded in the census of Singapore. Because of space and time constraints I set the sample size as 22 as the cinema where the participants would view the films can only accommodate 23 people and I needed to ensure all data collection were completed, including the interviews, before classes officially started to avoid rescheduling and the unavailability of venues.⁴⁹

Quota Sampling

From the purposive sample of respondents, I employed a quota sampling strategy to obtain appropriate numbers in the various religious categories. The goal was to obtain a sampling of participants from different (non)religious backgrounds as the study takes into consideration religious affiliation as a possible factor in shaping an individual's moral

⁴⁹ Students are allowed to drop and/or change their course selections up to the second week of the semester depending on their school. Thus, their schedules may still be tentative and there is more flexibility for them to complete the study without interruptions to their class attendance.

perspectives. I did not include a quota for ethnicity as race does not usually determine one's religious affiliation in Singapore although I aimed for cultural diversity. According to the Department of Statistics, Singaporean Chinese which forms over 75 percent of the citizen population have affiliations, besides Buddhism or Taoism which are traditionally associated with Chinese ethnicity, with Other Religions or No Religion categories ("Population Trends" 5). The number of males and females were also not predetermined but since infidelity in this study involves both genders as well, some male perspectives were needed. Abortion, the other topic, meant that I needed a larger number of female participants since the termination of a pregnancy involves the female body, although the decision to terminate sometimes rests on both parents.

To ensure I am not biased in selecting more or less people with a particular religious affiliation, I used the 2010 Singapore Census of Population as a guide to obtain my quota.⁵⁰ This ensured that all religious categories were included "regardless of their size and distribution in the population" (Patton 268). The sample was calculated based on the religion and age group as listed in table 58 and religion and place of birth from table 63 in the 2010 Census (170; 178). I did not include the age band 15-19 since none of the participants would be below 19. To obtain the figures, for instance, from table 58, the percentage for the total number of 'no religion' between ages 20-39 is derived from the total number of No Religion category for all age bands. This percentage was then multiplied by the figure in each religious category for 'resident born in Singapore' in table 63. From these calculations, the figure for those born in Singapore between ages 20-39 is thus obtained for each religious category. Then, based on the total number of residents between ages 20-39, the final percentage is generated for those born in Singapore across all religious categories. This percentage is used to multiply by the sample size of 22 to get the figures for recruiting in each religious category.

⁵⁰ The census is conducted every 10 years. See Wong.

As there was no data in the census that shows the religious category for each educational level, the decision was made to combine the information from tables 58 and

63. The aim was to get an accurate as possible a composite picture of the demographics in this study. From these calculations, the quota sampling would be closer to these two values as set out in tables 58 and 63. Thus, the aim was to have, as Guest et al. describe, proportional as possible the relative size of the sample in the categories to “their relative size in the larger population” (51). I started a handwritten sheet with names, school, gender, ethnicity and religious affiliation once I received emails from respondents wanting to participate. From this sheet, I could tell immediately which religious category was under or over the quota.

Recruitment

A total of 73 people responded. This figure does not include those who were interested in participating but had their friends query on their behalf instead. Of the 73, some were ineligible because they did not fit all of the criteria while others who were eligible did not respond further to my requests for their religious affiliations and were therefore excluded from consideration.⁵¹ The female respondents outnumbered the males. There were also a high proportion of undergraduate respondents from the Humanities and Social Sciences club and the English division which had the highest number in the Islamic category. In this case, I considered carefully respondents from other disciplines who belonged to this category as well before making a decision to ensure a mix of genders and/or age groups. Only three Buddhists and three Taoists responded who met the criteria. Only one Sikh, who later realised had other commitments elsewhere and could not be recruited, and one Catholic responded.

⁵¹ A few had responded to someone's posting of the recruitment on social media without my knowledge, which resulted in queries from students and faculty in other local and overseas universities, even though the recruitment document was clearly addressed to 'NTU student.' The post was removed at my request as the recruitment was for current students of NTU and the study information was approved for dissemination via email among the NTU population only.

The actual number of individuals recruited in each category was based on the calculations from the census information as illustrated in Table 1. Figures were rounded to the next highest number. Respondents listed in Table 1 refer only to those who responded and who were eligible for consideration during the recruitment phase. The recruitment for some categories differed to that of the census calculations due to several reasons. For instance, the census does not specify the types of non-religious affiliations or the various Christian denominations. Hence, I over recruited in these two categories to allow for different subgroups as they may have a bearing on the ways in which they evaluate moral issues. Quotas establish a “baseline” for starting an investigation but the “size and composition of the sample can be adjusted based on what is learned as the inquiry deepens” (Patton 285). Thus, for the No Religion category, subgroupings were created with the affiliations the respondents had identified themselves with. These were Agnosticism, Atheism, and Freethinking. These subgroups would allow me to compare if their views on the moral issues correspond to or differ from each and to find interconnections, if any, between them. Furthermore, as Zaccheus et al. state, there are now more youths “shunning religion” in Singapore. Thus, over recruiting in the No Religion category is a more accurate reflection of the current demographic. For the Christians, I also created subgroups based on the responses received: Baptist, Pentecostal Charismatic, Presbyterian, and Non-denominational (Evangelical). To make the adjustments, I had to recruit one less from the Islam category,⁵² used the quota for the Sikhism category because there was no eligible respondent, and that of Buddhism because there were few eligible respondents in that category. Although the actual figure for the Other Religions category was similar to Sikhism based on the census, I did not include it in the quota sample because each subgroup of this category would be too small. However, I was open to

⁵² The Islamic category comprises about 14% of the Singaporean population and consists mainly of Sunnis. The Shia categories would be a minority. Similarly, I did not make distinctions for the various factions of Buddhism such as Zen and Tibetan forms. Further, the census figures do not make distinctions for Buddhism and Islam but account for Catholicism and Christianity as separate factions.

including it in the sample if there were respondents in this category and if quotas for other religious categories were not filled.

Table 1: Quota Sampling

Religion	No Religion	Buddhism	Taoism	Islam	Hinduism	Sikhism	Catholicism	Christianity	Other
Quota	4	7	2	4	1	1	1	2	0
22 Recruited	8	3	2	3	1	0	1	4	0
5 No-shows	1			2	1			1	
2 Withdrawals			1	1					
15 Participants	7	3	1	0	0	0	1	3	0

22 individuals between the ages 19-33 were recruited. But there were five no-shows, that is, those who were recruited but did not turn up on the first day of data collection. These were from the No religion (Atheism), Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity (Pentecostal Charismatic) categories. Also, there was one withdrawal after the first day of data collection due to a course scheduling conflict and another on the second day because of a commitment elsewhere.

A total of 15 Singaporean (under)graduate participants comprising 10 females (nine Chinese and one Indian) and five Chinese males completed this study. All were undergraduates except for two who were in the Master's and doctoral degree programmes. 12 of the participants were between ages 20-24 and three in the 25-39 age group. There was one participant each from: Biomedical Engineering; Chemical Biology; Film Studies; IGS-CELSE; Maritime Studies; Mass Communication; Mathematics; Psychology. There were two each from Mechanical Engineering and Sociology, and three from English.

Purposive Sampling of Films

The Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) rating criteria for media is different from other countries and the classification of films are usually in tandem with “community values and social norms” in Singapore (“Consultation with Committees”). Thus, some films were precluded for consideration due to its rating and content. For instance, Lee Ang’s *Brokeback Mountain*, based on Annie Proulx’s book, portrays heterosexual marital relationships, but the spouses in each marriage engage in an affair with a person of the same gender which may be objectionable to and uncomfortable for some participants to watch.⁵³ Although the film is rated R in the United States according to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), which means children under 17 years old can watch the film if accompanied by a parent or an adult guardian (“Film Ratings”), it has a R21 rating in Singapore, which is restricted to those aged 21 and above (IMDA, “Brokeback Mountain”).

As the recruitment was for participants aged 19 – 39, I considered films with the IMDA classification from G to M18, the latter suitable for those 18 and above, in the DVD formats only as I would be using this version for the screenings. In addition, they have to pass “clean”⁵⁴ because any cuts by the IMDA may affect the content and overall experience of the film (“Films Classification Database”). According to the IMDA, some films may have a different rating for cinema screenings to that of the DVD version because the trailers for other movies, deleted scenes, or bonus materials in the latter may contain material that exceeds the rating given for the cinema audience. For example, *The Cider House Rules* had a NC16 “Passed Clean” for its DVD format but a PG “Passed with Cuts” in the film format.⁵⁵

⁵³ Under Penal Code section 377, Singapore prohibits oral and anal sex between consenting adults. In 2007, an Amendment Bill proposed the repeal of section 377 but section 377A which prohibits similar acts between persons of the same gender is still applicable at the time of writing, although the Prime Minister “assured that the government ... would not actively enforce section 377A” (Lim, P.L.).

⁵⁴ A ‘pass clean’ means there are no cuts to the original version of the film.

⁵⁵ DVD versions approved for sale in Singapore are up to M18 only.

Purposive Sample of five films: *Revolutionary Road* (M18); *The Age of Innocence* (PG); *The Bridges of Madison County* (NC16); *The Cider House Rules* (NC16); *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1* (PG13). The selected films contain specific illustrations of deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. Preselecting the texts enables me to make comparisons of responses from individuals with diverse backgrounds to the same body of work (Krippendorff 94-5), although the drawback is “limited generalization” to other films with similar content (Flick 142) but this type of sampling allows me to achieve “depth in [my] data analyses” because of the narrow scope (124).

Films, Characters, and Synopses

The Age of Innocence (1993); 138 min. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Novel by Edith Wharton. Setting: 1870s, New York.

Characters (actors): Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis); Ellen Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer); May Welland (Winona Ryder).

Synopsis: The story is narrated in some parts of the film. Newland, a lawyer, is engaged to May. He falls in love with Ellen, a countess from Europe who has separated from her husband and newly arrived in New York. Ellen is May’s cousin and Newland is handling her divorce. He decides to hasten his wedding to May while continuing to see Ellen. Despite being offered a way out of the engagement by May, he proceeds with the wedding. He still tries to meet with Ellen after he is married although they do not have a physical relationship. Later, Ellen decides to return to Europe. Newland wants to travel but May’s announcement that she is pregnant rules out his plan. When May dies years later, he has the opportunity to meet Ellen in Paris with his son. However, he decides to remain below Ellen’s apartment. They never see each other again.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1 (2011); 112 min. Directed by Bill Condon.

Novel by Stephenie Meyer. Setting: 2000s, Forks.

Characters (actors): Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart); Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson); Jacob Black (Taylor Lautner).

Synopsis: *The Twilight Saga* comprises five films: *Twilight*; *New Moon*; *Eclipse*; *Breaking Dawn* Parts 1 and 2. The romance between Edward, a vampire, and Bella, a human, is explored in the first three films culminating in their wedding in *Breaking Dawn* Part 1. Jacob who is a Quileute shape-shifter (wolf) and Bella develop romantic feelings for each other in *New Moon* and Jacob has hopes that Bella would choose him over Edward until Bella's marriage. Jacob's feelings for Bella dissipate when Renesmee (Bella and Edward's daughter) is born at the end of *Breaking Dawn* Part 1 when he imprints on her. In the Twilight world, imprinting is equivalent to finding a soul mate. In this film, Bella discovers she is pregnant on her honeymoon with Edward. They rush back to the Cullen's family home where Carlisle, the head of the family, who is a doctor, can tend to her. The foetus grows quickly and causes Bella to lose weight and starts breaking her bones from the inside. The other wolves from Jacob's tribe decide to kill the foetus before it is born as they fear it would not be able to control its thirst for human blood. Jacob decides to leave the pack and help the Cullens thwart their plan. The foetus is forcibly removed when Bella's spine cracks. She dies but is given venom for her transformation into a vampire so she can live. The wolves arrive to fight the Cullens while Jacob imprints on Renesmee, who looks human. The wolves retreat on learning this as it is their law that whomever is imprinted on cannot be harmed.

The Bridges of Madison County (1995); 134 min. Directed by Clint Eastwood. Novel by Robert James Waller. Setting: 1960s, Iowa.

Characters (actors): Francesca Johnson (Meryl Streep); Robert Kincaid (Clint Eastwood); Richard Johnson (Jim Haynie).

Synopsis: Francesca has a four-day affair with Robert, a National Geographic photographer, who passes through Madison County when her family is out of town. Her two adult children, Carolyn and Michael, discover the affair after her death when she leaves behind her diaries for them to read. They are surprised at first that she wants to be cremated and her ashes strewn over the Roseman Bridge in Madison County instead of being buried next to their father, Richard. As they read her diaries, they begin to understand the relationship between their mother and Robert and why she had decided to stay with her family. The night before her family is due home, Francesca packs her bags to leave with Robert. However, she changes her mind. Robert said he would be staying in town for a few days, to wait for her decision. When her family returns home, Francesca and her husband Richard drive to town to get supplies. While in their truck at a traffic crossing, Robert waits for her in his truck to leave with him. But she does not. Years later, when Robert dies, his lawyer sends her the book of pictures which he took of Roseman Bridge during the period when they met.

The Cider House Rules (1999); 125min. Directed by Lasse Hallström. Novel by John Irving.

Setting: 1940s, St. Cloud's orphanage and the Worthington apple orchard.

Characters (actors): Homer Wells (Tobey Maguire); Dr Wilbur Larch (Michael Caine); Candy (Charlize Theron); Wally Worthington (Paul Rudd).

Synopsis: Homer is an orphan at St. Cloud's who was returned after a few unsuccessful adoptions. Dr Larch, who is in charge of the orphanage, trains him to deliver, mostly unwanted, babies, while Dr Larch secretly performs abortions. Homer meets Candy who

arrives with her fiancé Wally for an abortion. Homer decides to leave St. Cloud's with them to work in Wally's apple orchard. When Wally leaves to serve in the war, Candy and Homer have a sexual relationship. Homer decides to perform an abortion when it is discovered that Rose, a fellow worker in the orchard, is pregnant as a result of rape. Rose's father had started an incestuous relationship with her. Rose leaves soon after stabbing her father. Before he dies, Rose's father asks Homer to lie to the authorities that he committed suicide, in order to protect his daughter. Wally returns home from the war paralysed from the waist and Candy decides to stay with him. Dr Larch had also died earlier from an overdose of ether. Homer then returns to St. Cloud's to take his position, made possible as Dr Larch had faked medical credentials for Homer.

Revolutionary Road (2008); 119 min. Directed by Sam Mendes. Novel by Richard Yates.

Setting: 1950s, Connecticut.

Characters (actors): Frank Wheeler (Leonardo DiCaprio), April Wheeler (Kate Winslett); Shep (David Harbour).

Synopsis: Frank and April Wheeler live on Revolutionary Road with their two young children. She is a housewife and an unsuccessful actress while he is in sales. On his birthday, he has sex with a co-worker and continues to see her intermittently. Meanwhile April thinks they would be happy living in Paris so they decide to move to escape the tedium in their lives. April's third pregnancy changes their plans. Frank is also offered a better job and is reluctant to move. One night, while out with their neighbours, April has sex with Shep.

When Frank finds out April had bought a device for abortion, they have an argument. One morning, Frank goes to the kitchen to find April has made breakfast for him and is polite and seems interested in his work. After breakfast, April performs the abortion but she bleeds. She dies in hospital later. Frank moves to the city with his two children.

Sampling considerations

There were several factors that influenced my choice of films. First, it was based on the assumption that these films can function as thought experiments as they offer vivid portrayals of moral predicaments which prompt moral reflection. In other words, they would be able to trigger associative/dissociative responses in the audience to the moral content. My questions on moral issues in films were also largely informed by the ways in which films might illustrate moral concepts and theories about them. As Wartenberg claims, “films can make arguments, provide counterexamples to philosophical claims, and put forward novel philosophical theories” (9). For example, in *Breaking Dawn*, Edward’s confession to Bella on the eve of their wedding about hunting murderers presents both utilitarian and deontological arguments on killing to prevent future harm to humans. But in *Age of Innocence*, the moral positions are not immediately apparent. *Cider House Rules* is tilted towards utilitarianism as shown in Dr Larch’s arguments on abortion. These are juxtaposed with Homer’s initial stance that abortion is still a form of killing which has inherent deontological features. The corpus of five films meets the criteria as set out in the moral framework for a range of moral actions appropriated by the film characters in their predicaments, with some consequences of morally questionable decisions having bad or good effects on their relations with others, and the extent to which the characters might embody characteristics from Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Second, *Age of Innocence*, *Bridges of Madison County*, *Cider House Rules* and *Revolutionary Road* are all mainstream Hollywood productions in the drama genre. Dramas have more in-depth character interactions and often portray life situations, which may be realistic and applicable to particular contexts (Dirks, “Main Film Genres”). These would be able to trigger an audience’s response to the issues, whether there is an association or disassociation with, or ambivalence towards a character’s decision/action in a moral

predicament. According to Downing and Saxton, genre has “potential to yield specific ethical responses” through the ways in which characters are portrayed in certain scenes for the audience to ponder the ramifications of the moral actions on screen (13). The films deal with particular moral issues, which present conflicts for the characters and their interpersonal relationships within the familial milieu, even in *Cider House Rules* where the orphanage functions as a home and its director, a pseudo parent to the orphans. Individuals in the films are also constrained by societal norms and sometimes their choices or decisions are dictated by familial or personal obligations and informed by virtues. *Breaking Dawn* is also a mainstream Hollywood film but classified as an adventure/fantasy according to the IMDb. Adventure films depict “struggles and situations that confront the main characters” (Dirks, “Adventure Films”). In *Breaking Dawn*, Jacob abandons his pack to protect Bella’s baby who may potentially kill his tribe and other humans later if allowed to live. Edward struggles to accept Bella’s decision to carry the baby to term knowing that she will die as a result while the Cullen family strives to honour the treaty not to attack Jacob’s pack even as they try to protect their own. The vampires and werewolves also co-exist with the humans in this fantasy and the successful birth of a half-human, half-vampire child transcends “the bounds of human possibility and physical laws” (Dirks, “Fantasy Films”). Thus, I included this film in the sample as the plot can also be understood as a stand-alone without having to watch the entire saga.⁵⁶

Third, because infidelity is one of the primary moral issues under investigation, I selected films in the romance subgenre as the characters’ romantic liaisons or marital relationship with each other have to contribute to the main plot focus. Both male and female protagonists engage in different degrees of unfaithfulness in marital and non-marital

⁵⁶This point was confirmed by some participants in the interviews. I had initially watched *Eclipse* first before I began research for this project, not knowing anything about the *Twilight Saga* and its popularity. Then after watching the entire saga, I felt that each film could be understood without knowing the back story so I included it in the sample.

relationships which allow points of contrasts and comparisons for the participants to ruminate. For instance, the romantic relationship between Bella and Edward is a running thread throughout *The Twilight Saga*, and Jacob's romantic feelings for Bella are apparent until the end of *Breaking Dawn* Part 1. I deliberately did not choose films where the protagonists leave their existing relationships for the person with whom they were having an affair, because I wanted to know whether the participants would consider this alternative as a viable option themselves, based on the statistic that infidelity is the most cited cause for divorce in Singapore.

Fourth, at least some of the films also had to include depictions of abortions in varying circumstances, which is the other primary moral issue under investigation, in order to keep the number of films manageable for the participants to watch. *Cider House Rules* presents abortions of unwed mothers as well as one resulting from incest/rape, while *Revolutionary Road* illustrates a married woman performing her own abortion. In *Breaking Dawn*, pro-life and pro-choice arguments are equally presented in a counterexample to abortion where the foetus is endangering the mother's life but she chooses to carry it until birth. But the birth through forced means subsequently costs the mother's life as a human and she is transformed into a vampire after death. Thus, boundaries had to be set that determine the parameters for analysis, as it is impossible to sample a larger number of films dealing separately with infidelity and abortion.

Lastly, most of the films have been nominated for or received awards. *Age of Innocence* won an Oscar and a Golden Globe. *Cider House Rules* snagged two Oscars while *Revolutionary Road* received a Golden Globe. *Breaking Dawn – Part 1* and *Bridges of Madison County* won the ASCAP Award for Top Box Office Films.⁵⁷ As Fu and Lee found, there is a correlation between sales performances in the exporting country to the Singapore

⁵⁷ For a complete list of nominations and awards for the films, see The Internet Movie Database for more information.

cinema market (23-4). Moreover, most of the films have been adapted from books that are bestsellers, while *Age of Innocence* had won the Pulitzer Prize and *Revolutionary Road* was a finalist for the National Book Award. These factors generally indicate a larger audience based on the publicity that can potentially be affected by the content. I was also open to exploring the possibility of the books having any moral resonance for the participants in comparison to the films, if they had read them prior to the study as there are differences in the narratives between the two mediums.⁵⁸

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study, ethical considerations were largely informed by Kantian moral principles and the “relativism approach” (Wimmer and Dominick 67). The latter alludes to the practical deliberations for the study which were in accordance with the research culture at NTU where my research topic, procedures, and data collection methods were scrutinized and approved by the IRB before the recruitment and data collection could begin. Furthermore, in line with NTU’s research policies, I had also attended an online certificate course, *Research Integrity for the Social and Behavioural Sciences*. In reference to Kant, Wimmer and Dominick submit that a researcher may follow the “categorical imperative” regarding deception, which means that it should not be present in research regardless of the benefits or situations that may arise (66), as it is deliberately providing false information or lying about all or certain aspects of the study (72). However, I did not reveal what primary moral issues were being investigated or which films were included although I received one query from a respondent on the latter. The withholding of the information was necessary in this study as I did not want potential participants to discuss and have preconceived ideas about the films

⁵⁸ I did not include the reading of the novels as a recruitment criterion, otherwise the pool of potential participants would be too small. Moreover, the primary aim of the study was to study the film audience and not readers of these novels.

before data collection began, as I was interested in individual film experiences and moral perspectives. I was truthful in disseminating accurate information and debriefed the participants on the significance of the research at the end of the study.

During the recruitment process, the respondents were informed of what the study entailed through the recruitment email document, which stated precisely when the data collection would occur and its duration, and what was required of the participants. Upon selection, the informed consent forms (Appendices B and C) which provided more details about the study were emailed to participants to give consent so they and their parent, if they are below 21 years old, could read it first and have any questions answered before data collection began. The signed consent forms were handed to me on the first day of the data collection phase which were checked for participant and, if applicable, parental signatures. The participants were also told to bring their National Registration Identification Card (NRIC) on the first day and NTU student matriculation card throughout the data collection period verifying they are at least 21 years old if they did not present the signed parental consent form and to check their student status. The latter was to ensure only those present were actually approved for participation in the study. All verification was done before each session of the data collection.

Before the start of each data collection phase, I briefed the participants on what the research was about and explained that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. The participant and parental consent forms also stated that withdrawal from or discontinuation of participating in the study had no penalty and would not affect their status in the university. There was also a question and answer session scheduled at the end of the film viewing sessions so participants could voice any concerns or have further queries answered. There was no further communication with those who were no-shows or attempts to persuade those who withdrew from the study partway as I acknowledged the autonomy of

the individuals and that “all research participation must be voluntary” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 110), even though their withdrawal affected the quota in some religious categories.

Following the ethical checklist suggested by Patton (409) and the ethical principles as delineated by Wimmer and Dominick (67), individual right to privacy was protected, the risk of harm to participants was carefully balanced against the benefit of obtaining knowledge, all individuals were treated equally, and with respect. In this manner, the “moral integrity” of the researcher is preserved throughout the process so that the findings are “trustworthy and valid” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 59).

Equality. All individuals were treated equally in my interactions with them. For instance, I did not favour one respondent over another and explained in my individual emails to them that there was a quota across all religious categories and once they were filled, I would stop recruiting for that specific category. I also replied to all email queries promptly when the respondents wanted to clarify pertinent details before deciding to participate. Once selected, I emailed a list of 30 interview slots for the 22 participants to choose. The time slots were confirmed in the order in which I received them so no one was privileged over another. In addition, all respondents were thanked individually via email for their interest and also late respondents were informed when the recruitment phase was closed.

Non-maleficence. I did not anticipate any physical distress to the participants in the study. The corpus of films was MDA-approved for audiences aged 18 and above, although I appreciated that some scenes may be uncomfortable to watch, such as those depicting sex or abortion. Since I did not know if potential participants had personally experienced infidelity, were pregnant or had an abortion, there was a possibility that the participants might encounter some mental stress watching some of the moral predicaments portrayed in the films or discussing the issues in the interview. In this case, the right to withdraw from the study was

one option and the counselling and wellness centres were other avenues that I could offer to the participants if they needed assistance. In some instances, time was given between interview questions to allow participants to regain their composure when they appeared emotionally flustered while relating their thoughts and experiences. In one interview, I decided not to push too hard for data as it was determined that no further probing would elicit new or additional information and the topic under discussion was clearly distressing to the participant as it was an ongoing problem. Regular breaks were also scheduled during data collection, the air-conditioning was adjusted periodically if it was too cold, and refreshments were provided to ensure the participants' well-being and comfort. Offers of postponement were refused, when I noted a couple of participants seemed unwell when they arrived for the interviews, and extra breaks were suggested but declined.

Respect. As the study involved participants with different religious affiliations across disciplines, I was mindful of the religious sensitivities of the individuals and their educational backgrounds, particularly when their academic training, beliefs or values collide with my own. There were instances when I found it exacting to pose a question in such a manner that would not be challenged as scientifically impossible or implausible because of the divergent epistemological positions of this researcher and the participant. Nonetheless, I rephrased the question, remained engaged and respectful in the opinions expressed even if I did not always concur with them. This was possible due to my own ontological assumptions governing this study and the sense of kinship with the participants as part of the NTU student community collaborating in the research process.

Privacy. I was mindful to ensure my reply to respondents was addressed only to each individual particularly when they were responding to the recruitment from a master list that also contained other individual email addresses. Similarly, correspondences with the participants throughout the study were emailed individually so information about the

participants was not known to each other. For the recorded interviews, the camera was turned off and as an added precaution, the participants sat with their backs to the camera. They were also asked to wait outside the interview room when they had arrived early during the data collection as librarians, other students, or vendors were tending to the recording equipment when there were technical difficulties but the researcher was present at all times to ensure privacy was not compromised. All interviews were conducted in private between the researcher and each participant. Recordings were also scheduled with sufficient breaks in between the interviews so the data could be saved and stored securely before the next interview began.

Confidentiality. On the first day of data collection, as soon as personal details were verified and consent forms were collected, the list with full personal details and the subsequent questionnaires with identifying marks including all consent forms were kept in a locked drawer in a private area which only this researcher had the key to it. I made another list of participants without identifying details for attendance purposes which was carried on my person at all times during the data collection and kept in the same locked drawer at other times. As soon as data was collected, I substituted all names with handwritten pseudonyms which were kept locked when not in use. In other words, there was no electronic saved version which linked the actual names with the pseudonyms. Each interview recording and each transcript was saved under the given pseudonym for each participant on the researcher's personal computer which is password protected and not known to anyone else. Only the researcher had access to all the names and personal details of the participants. Recordings done on the software programme were automatically deleted from the server.

Some participants were concerned about them breaking confidences in relation to the moral issues under discussion but they were reassured with the promise of confidentiality as I did not personally know the people whom the participants were discussing about. Besides, no

names were mentioned in the interviews. There were situations once after the interview had ended, participants confided their thoughts on their educational choices and parental pressures but these were not included in the data collection. I surmised that the participants would have assumed these were not part of the study as the recordings had ended. Receipts were not issued for the incentives given out at the end of the data collection to maintain confidentiality. However, participations signed on the attendance list as proof of receipt. This list was kept on my person during the data collection phase and kept in a locked drawer if not in use.

Disclosure. In addition to the ethical principles applied in this study, there was also no conflict of interest as the recruitment incentive and expenses incurred in this research were solely borne by the researcher. All the participants were previously unknown to me at the time of recruitment until the completion of the data collection. There was full disclosure about my identity and the purpose of the study, which was to gain individual perspectives on moral issues to complete the research for the fulfilment of the PhD degree.

Copyright. The screenplays were freely available on the internet for download and I treated them as scripted versions of the films. The DVD versions of the films were borrowed from the libraries at NTU and the subject librarian was informed they would be used in the data collection for this study. All the DVDs were approved for viewing in an institutional setting and were utilized in accordance with NTU's library regulations. The images used were subjected to copyright laws in Singapore. After data collection and analyses, the DVDs were returned to the libraries.

Data Collection. The types of data collection were: (a) pre-existing audio-visual material; (b) documents; (c) personal interviews. Screenplays were downloaded from the internet and checked for errors in the dialogue. The DVDs were procured from the Library

Outpost and the Art, Design and Media library (ADML) at NTU. Once I received IRB approval to start data collection, I reserved the Cinema Room at the ADML for the film screenings and the Recording Room at the Lee Wee Nam library (LWNL) for the interviews. Special arrangements had to be made with the Humanities and Social Sciences librarian who was the liaison with the respective libraries as access was limited to the researcher for multiple and extended bookings of these venues. The data collection from participants commenced on the 10th of August and ended on the 31st of August, 2017. The films were screened on 10th and 17th August. Interviews were conducted from 23-31 August. The specifics of how these data collection methods were used in this study are described in the following sections.

FILMS AS AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIAL

Film as an “unobtrusive method” of data collection allows for the observation of both manifest and latent content and provides an “opportunity for participants to directly share their reality [since] ... it captures attention visually” (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 180). In this study, film acts as a “proxy for human experience” as it privileges the way the audience subjectively think about the moral issues and feel in relation to the consumption of the films (Guest et al. 8). Through character dialogue and actions, the moral positions on abortion and infidelity in the films are revealed and by observing the characters’ facial expressions, gestures, and body language, inferences can be made on these positions. The films, therefore, can inform a more detailed interview, bringing out meaningful issues in the films for the participants that might otherwise be difficult for them to talk about. As Denzin puts it, through the Hollywood films in this study, we can understand and express ourselves and our social settings (*The Cinematic Society* 117). This method of data collection affords the researcher the means to understand the relationship between the film and individual,

culture, and society, [as these artefacts] provide a “socially constructed reality” (Brennen 193). As a trigger to elicit responses, film allows the researcher to explore the relationship between the moral content in film and participants’ moral perspectives in the context of their film experiences. This was important to the study as I am aware I bring a certain perspective to the film analysis, so the participants’ reception to the films would balance any bias on the researcher’s part. Prior to the data collection, I had already watched each of the films at least five times.

The participants were instructed to watch the films and answer a questionnaire at the end of each film. I did not give further details about the film viewing activities although they understood from the recruitment and consent forms that I was conducting research on moral issues and perspectives. The decision was made based on the assumption that individuals would usually watch a film once. Based on a single viewing, I was keen to know what they could identify as moral elements from the issues depicted in the film, where their attention was focused, and what they think of the moral predicaments through their own understanding and experience of the films. Therefore, the activity was undertaken in a controlled environment to some extent as I did not want other individuals’ opinions to influence a participant’s response.

I was involved in the film viewing activities to get close to the people and [phenomena] under study in the position of co-participant which necessitates watching the films with them (Patton 46). This positioning helped establish and maintain rapport, particularly useful in the interview phase, and also provided a platform for sharing, as some participants offered their initial impressions of the films with me during the film viewing breaks. To negate any disruption to or influence on the participations’ viewing activities, I sat at the back of the room so the participants could not read my response to the films through

my facial expressions or body language.⁵⁹

Cinema room

The ADML webpage listed that the cinema room could accommodate up to 30 people; however, I was informed it could only seat 23 people comfortably. It is modelled similarly to an entertainment facility, carpeted, accentuated with warm dimmable lights, and is sound proofed.⁶⁰

Film Screenings.⁶¹

After checking the participants' particulars and the consent forms on the 10th, I conducted the briefing prior to the film viewing activity. Attendance was checked prior to every screening. I screened *Cider House Rules*, followed by a lunch break before screening

⁵⁹ There was one other viewer for the first and last film during data collection, a colleague of mine from another school at NTU, who assisted with the equipment as I was occupied with the paperwork and participants.

⁶⁰ Chairs were placed in the middle of the room and benches upholstered in velvet cushions line both sides of the room. However, with 15 participants and 1 researcher, there was just enough personal space between the participants seated on chairs because the benches do not allow for comfortable viewing as the screen is situated at the centre wall at one end of the room. Foldable tabletops are attached to individual seats so the participants could use them to fill out the questionnaires. The sound system is comparable to an indoor mini cinema so the dialogue and sound effects were distinctly clear.

⁶¹ Initially I had scheduled for *Age of Innocence* and *Revolutionary Road* to be screened on the 10th and *Cider House Rules*, *Bridges of Madison County*, and *Breaking Dawn* on the 17th. This is because including *Age of Innocence*, the lengthiest film, with two other films would result in lesser time to conduct the briefing for the interviews and the question and answer session. However, because the week of the 10th was during the vacation break, the library opening and closing hours were shorter as compared to the week of the 17th, the start of the academic semester. Besides, the cinema room had to be vacated half an hour before closing and I had to allocate sufficient time for the briefing before screening began on the 10th and the briefing for the interviews on the 17th. I was also only able to check that the equipment was in working order and set them up shortly before the participants' arrival, as the staff would arrive just before the library's opening hours. Verifying that the equipment was in good condition before the data collection phase would not have ensured it was not faulty on the actual day of the screenings as it may have been used by others in between then. Due to the various constraints, the cinema room was therefore booked from 0930 am - 430pm on the 10th and from 0930 - 9pm on the 17th. The briefing for the interviews was originally scheduled at the end of day on the 17th. However, I decided to conduct that after the tea break on the 17th to avoid keeping other participants waiting; as I had observed on the 10th, some participants took longer than others to fill out the questionnaires. In this way, participants who had filled out the questionnaire for the last film could leave immediately or speak to me if they had questions about the upcoming interviews or concerns about the study.

Bridges of Madison County. However, I noticed that after lunch the participants seemed a bit sluggish. So, for the 17th, I changed the order of the films, screening *Age of Innocence* in the morning as it was the lengthiest film, instead of after lunch as had originally planned, to maintain focus. This was followed by a lunch break and the screening of *Revolutionary Road*, a tea break followed by the interview briefing, and screening of the shortest film, *Breaking Dawn*. The data collection for the film screenings ended by 8.15pm on the 17th. None of the participants knew the titles of the films prior to each screening. The participants were informed when selected that they would not be allowed to continue in the study if they were late for any of the screenings as missing the beginning segments of the films may have an impact on their understanding of the narratives. Screenings were delayed by a couple of minutes in some instances to accommodate for tardiness. One participant was late, slept through portions of *Age of Innocence* and had to be woken up by the researcher a few times as the snores were distracting to the participants. He was informed he had to leave the study if the slumber continued. At the end of *Age of Innocence*, the participant apologised and explained he had watched it before. He remembered the story well and was able to complete the questionnaire. One participant could not answer a question regarding a scene in *Age of Innocence* because of a washroom break. A few participants were also absent for this reason during certain segments of *Breaking Dawn* for about 10-15 minutes as the washroom is located at a considerable distance from the cinema room. The participants informed me at the end that they had also watched the film prior to the study so they could answer the questions about the film.⁶² Perhaps because the participants understood their responses to the films were central to the study, the participants did not always “switch off their brains” in front of a film (Silverman 320). On the contrary, they were totally immersed in the films

⁶² Food and drink, except water, were not allowed in the cinema room due to library regulations and the participants were also reminded of this. There were also intermittent messaging notifications from one of the participants' phones on one occasion but the participant stopped using her phone after noting a sign from me. Otherwise, the participants watched the films in their entirety without leaving the room.

most of the time. At certain moments, they gasped at unexpected actions or outcomes, cringed when cued by the sound effects in some scenes, and marvelled aloud to each other when certain middle-aged actors, looking still youthful, appeared on screen. However, the researcher's casual observations did not always correspond to what the participants later revealed in the questionnaires and interviews (I had not set out to observe but found myself curious about their reception, with thoughts such as whether they were indifferent to the narrative, unmoved by the moral predicaments, or sympathetic to specific characters). I noticed one participant who seemed focused, never left the room during any of the screenings, but wrote in the questionnaires of her boredom and impatience with some of the characters and films and later, riled about them in the interview. I had also observed another who was scanning the other participants for their reactions during the screening of *Bridges of Madison County*, for close to 40 minutes. But the participant indicated in the questionnaire that he became engrossed in the movie later as some scenes reflected his own situation when he had to make a difficult decision regarding his own romantic relationship.

Documents

Documents can include questionnaire data or program scripts and images from the media that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention (Bowen 26-28). In this study, both film scripts and questionnaires were used for a systematic examination and interpretation of the manifest data. I downloaded and printed out the screenplays of the films which were publicly accessible on the internet instead of transcribing the film dialogue as it would be too time consuming.

Film Scripts

Screen directions were ignored as they were not needed for the study. For each script, I watched the corresponding film in its entirety while actively listening to the dialogue and

making quick notations on the printed script where there were errors. Then I viewed the scenes of the film where those occurred and made corrections to a word or line where necessary in the script but they were minimal. Finally, I viewed the entire film again paying attention to areas where corrections were made and ensuring there were no missed errors in the rest of the script. The changes were also made in the soft copies of the scripts and imported to NVivo 11. As a source of evidence, the film scripts enabled me to organise the data according to the moral framework.

QUESTIONNAIRES

These provided “supplementary research data” to the films and interviews (Lincoln and Guba 101). There were a total of 10 questions in each film questionnaire; the first three questions and question 10 are repeated for each film (Appendices D - H). The focus of the questions centred around experience, opinions, and feelings of the participants as they reflected on the films. There were reasons for the use of questionnaires. First, my aim was to explore identification of and individual reception to the issues in the films and how individuals make sense of the moral predicaments through their own points of view. For this reason, I did not consider focus group sessions after the film viewing activities as participant interactions are “dynamic” and participants tend to change their minds on previously held perspectives when challenged by other individuals in the group (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 200). Next, the completed questionnaires could also establish whether the films might have modified individual perspectives through the films’ positions on specific moral issues which would be explored fully in the interviews. Finally, I had considered the possibility it might be challenging for individuals to recall accurately their experiences of the films in the interval before the interview if they did not record them immediately.

Limitations

There were five questionnaires in total for each participant to fill out. In the briefing, they were instructed not to consult each other as I was interested in individual responses. I optically scanned the completed questionnaires for the first screening, *Cider House Rules*, during the lunch break and found some ineligible handwriting. I addressed this with the participants before the next film, *Bridges of Madison County*, was screened. I found some participants did not “fully describe their thoughts” and not all were “equally... perceptive” or descriptive which is a limitation of the method (Creswell, *Research Design* 180). One participant consistently gave short answers in all questionnaires but was descriptive and articulate in the interview. A participant had drawn a question mark beside a question about the birthing scene in *Breaking Dawn*, which is one of the problems with open-ended questionnaires due to interpretation issues as Wimmer and Dominick contend (188). Furthermore, while some participants took 10 minutes, others took longer to complete the questionnaires. In one instance, a participant took almost 30 minutes. While writing responses to *Age of Innocence*, the participant conferred with another before I intervened. She could not answer some questions and needed interpretation. It was suggested that she interpret the questions according to her own understanding of them. Despite the initial difficulty, her responses in the questionnaire for *Age of Innocence* were thoughtful and reflected her comprehension of the questions. During the interview, she explained she had difficulties with the characters’ accent and manner of speaking in *Age of Innocence*. This was unanticipated since English is the working language and also used in educational instruction in Singapore. I had not considered that accent and language from a different historical period would be barriers to understanding. She could not remember some character names in other films either but was asked to describe briefly as she saw fit whom she was referring to. Thus, for this data collection, I tried to be unobtrusive as possible for individual interpretations of

the questions and the films to allow for personal reflections to emerge.

Advantages

Despite the limitations, a quick study of the completed questionnaires enabled me to refine the interview schedule and include additional questions or delete redundant ones. An advantage is that they represent data in the participants' own words and some were illustrative of more in-depth reflections on the films. More importantly, they served to contextualise data collected in the interviews so discrepancies between responses in the questionnaires and responses during the interviews could be explored further and validated or invalidated.

A total of 75 questionnaires were typed in a Microsoft Word (MS) document in the form of a table before importing to NVivo 11, as the handwritten responses were difficult to decipher at times due to size. Thus, scanning into NVivo would exacerbate the problem when conducting an analysis of the material.⁶³ All the completed questionnaires with identifying marks were then stored in a locked cabinet. Therefore, in NVivo, the participants were only identified by pseudonyms.

INTERVIEWS

Interview slots for the participants were scheduled from 23 August to 31 August, from 9am to 9.30pm. There were extra slots allocated in the event a participant chose to postpone the interview or had to make amendments to the original schedule. The slots and requests for amendments were confirmed in the order the participants notified me of their preferred timings. There were no interviews scheduled on the weekends as the LWNL was closed on Sundays and I considered participants may not want to make a trip to campus on a

⁶³ NVivo is software for storing qualitative data.

Saturday if they did not have classes to attend as well. All interview recordings were saved onto my portable drive and downloaded to my personal computer under individual pseudonyms at the end of each day's interviews.

Recording room

The On Air box located outside of the recording room was turned on when recording was in progress so there were no intrusions. The room has a camera and three overhead microphones so they could record clearly even when participants whispered. The sound playback had a high acoustic quality. As an added precaution, the participants sat with their backs to the camera which was switched off prior to the start of each day's interviews. Thus, behind them would be the display screen which showed the recording progress. Its recording software, Classroom Replay, was pre-set to record to the maximum of one hour only. This meant I had to segment my interview script according to the topics and stopped when the recording was almost to the hour mark, then start recording for the next segment. Depending on how long the interview took and where I stopped, I had between 2-4 segments for each participant. For this reason, I could not take observational notes during the interview, as I had to monitor the recording time, refer to questionnaires when required, and concentrate on the participants' responses before deciding what questions could follow next. The stoppage time, however, gave the participants the opportunity to have refreshments and did not interfere with the participants' thought processes. Only one participant needed a washroom break of 10 minutes and the interview continued from where it stopped.

Interview type and purpose

A personal interview is a "focused, purposeful conversation" in an encounter between the researcher and the participant and was considered an essential tool to help unpack the

phenomena of abortion and infidelity (Brennen 27). I conducted a one-to one, face-to-face semi-structured interview, a method of collecting data from study participants by extracting detailed information about the participants' perspectives, values and experiences (Wimmer and Dominick 139) which allows the researcher control over the line of questioning to some extent (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 179). While there was an interview schedule for questioning (Appendix I), the interviews allowed for flexibility and openness such that other moral issues raised by the participants could be explored in-depth. The interviews relied on the participants' answers to determine the flow of the questions to some extent (Babbie 346-7) so participants had some "latitude and freedom" to discuss what was important to them (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 125). Hence, the interview schedule was also informed by participants' accounts and revised accordingly to include issues relevant to the study. The point of departure is the individuals as knowledge gained through interviews can capture direct quotations that illuminate perspectives and experiences, because the interview is "issue oriented" and offers the researcher access to individual reflections about a specific topic the researcher is interested in (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 120). However, a shortcoming is that some participants drifted off to unrelated topics and some confused questions on their moral perspectives with thoughts about character actions in the films. Nonetheless, as a tool, semi-structured interviews aided in the understanding and evaluating of participants' perceptions on the meaning of particular scenes in the films and provided detailed descriptions of these observations and experiences in relation to the participants' moral perspectives on the phenomena of abortion and infidelity. These were further analysed to develop thematic interpretations about the research questions. Thus, the interviews yielded exploratory and descriptive data on the "moral realities" which corresponded to the research strategy in this study (Silverman 203).

Interview Process

For the interviews, I had brought my interview schedule and the questionnaires of those who were scheduled for each day's interview as well as a list of interview prompts based on the films prepared prior to the data collection. I checked each participant's matriculation card when s/he arrived although by then I knew most of them by name, and explained the purpose of the interview, then stated how it was to be recorded. I reassured them of confidentiality and asked if they had any questions before proceeding with the recorded interview.

Each interview lasted between 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The difference in the interview lengths was partly attributed to instances where I quoted from the questionnaires to refresh the participants' memory of their responses when they could not remember character names or confused characters with another film, and verifying the correct reference to specific characters with them when they cited the actors' names instead. A few also veered off topic such as talking about taxation laws or LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transsexuals) activities in another country. Thus, the questionnaires were useful as a refresher and a guide to steer the conversation back to the interview agenda.

The interview prompts based on the films, which I had prepared in the event that the participants were reticent in the interviews, were not necessary after all as the questionnaires provided valuable conversation entries. They served as an ice-breaker because I could begin with something they were familiar with such as their response to a film, particularly for participants who appeared apprehensive at first because they were being interviewed, although there were no visible recording devices. I realised they had perceived me as a researcher instead of a co-participant when they arrived even though we had previously interacted during the film viewing activities. By using the questionnaire as an ice-breaker to ease into the process, the interview became a conversation – a co-constructed “intersubjective

enterprise of two persons [discussing] about common themes of interest” (Kvale and Brinkmann 218) although the dialogue was always centered on the researcher’s role as an “active listener” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 123).

Protocol

In the semi-structured scripted interviews, I adopted “an empathetic stance” in a position of neutrality “by establishing rapport and showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness” while being “mindful” of the dynamics during the interview process and the power relations between the participants and I (Patton 46). As the study was focused on film experiences and individual moral perspectives relating to abortion and infidelity, Flick suggests that this type of subjective knowledge of morality which are “explicit and immediately...express[ed] spontaneously” is best achieved through answering open questions ([5th ed.] 217). Hence, the interview questions were largely open-ended, designed to lead the conversation to the topics and their related issues, which were effective in achieving the research aims. Short-answer questions were introduced as part of their conversations about a topic. I realised when I introduced them to transition between topics as Guest et al. suggest (114) the participants sometimes became defensive. By introducing the short-answer questions into their conversations helped alter the mood considerably especially on those occasions when participants seemed troubled by a particular topic. For instance, when a participant revealed her mother was asked to abort her and was getting distraught, I took the opportunity after the participant finished, to ask a short-answer question about the family background. The switch allowed her to regain composure and we returned to explore her mother’s decision about the pregnancy after a few minutes. On one occasion, when a participant blustered about her being bullied in secondary school because of her “queer”

status, I allowed the participant to finish and used a short-answer question as a calming signal to ask about her educational background before guiding her back to the original question I had asked. With some participants, however, the few short questions on demographics were asked towards the end of the interview. Hence, the order and line of questioning depended heavily on the participants' facial expressions, body language and tone, and how the interview was progressing.

The interviews also had a conversational feel to it even though the participants did most of the talking. Incorporating answers from the film questionnaires into the interviews resulted in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere where there was much laughter at times from the participants when they shared their film experiences with me in a spirit of camaraderie. The way I had prefaced the interview questions by type: (in your opinion...); interpretative (what do you mean...); hypothetical (if you were in this situation...) allowed the participant to feel valued in giving their opinions. I got the sense they felt safe discussing their attitudes towards certain characters and the moral predicaments and linking them to their own moral perspectives and circumstances. Hesse-Biber and Leavy also speak of “markers” which the participant offers when talking about something else (126). I followed these up as soon as the participant finished talking, usually prefaced with, “you mentioned just now about...could you tell me more about it?” For example, when one participant kept insisting he thought infidelity was wrong in all the films, although he sympathised with a certain character, he dropped a marker about consequences were not good for his family. None of the films, according to my experience of them, portrayed adverse outcomes resulting directly from a character's infidelity and it seemed odd how he had linked fictional infidelity to consequences for *his* family. On follow up, I discovered that he was referring to his current familial situation where he and his siblings still had to live with strained conditions because of a parent's affair which had long ended. This valuable source of information would have

slipped through had I been less attentive to the participant and if he did not feel the environment was secure for the disclosure. The information allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of his moral perspective on infidelity.

To reach depth, “inductive probing” was used to establish causal relationships between the topics (Guest et al. 114). Based on the participants’ responses, there were times I had to give an impromptu thought experiment to elicit further insights or to achieve clarity on the moral perspectives when there appeared to be discrepant views on a topic. The idea for the thought experiment arose when one participant introduced the topic about euthanasia and linked it to abortion. I had found asking a series of questions relating to these two separate issues was counter-productive with the participant. Thus, the thought experiment incorporated several questions in the schedule to explore whether s/he thinks the mother or the foetus should be saved if a mother is in a vegetative state. This was extended to include a doctor’s responsibility, which was based on some participants’ reflections in the *Cider House Rules* questionnaire, and euthanasia. In this manner, the interview took on an interactive aspect as the participants asked questions about each stage of the thought experiment in order to ruminate before answering thoughtfully. In addition, the use of probes such as “mmm”, “right”, and so on were non-committal but conveyed to the participants I was listening which became cues to continue talking without the need for another question from me (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 130). From inductive probing, the participants were able to clarify their positions on the relevant topics, which provided accurate and rich data to the research aims. More importantly, through the interview protocol, the participants were able to provide contextual information in which to understand their perspectives by recounting their own interactions with moral predicaments encountered in their daily lives. At the end of the interview, I thanked them and asked if they had any further questions or if there was anything they might like to add, to give them the opportunity to deal with issues they might have missed.

Feedback

Once the recording was switched off, some gave their feedback when asked about the film viewing activities. Two participants said viewing three films in one day was manageable but rather lengthy. One of them suggested five films in three days would be better. However, they thought five separate screenings would be a higher demand on their time and would also not likely to participate if the study had taken place during the semester break. One participant stated she did the study out of curiosity and one said he participates in all types of research on campus as he was interested in what others are doing in academia. Some were motivated both by the incentive which they thought was good and the opportunity to watch films. The majority were eager to know more about the study and its significance. A few were visibly moved that abortion rates were high among the graduate population even though they were self-claimed pro-abortion individuals. Regarding the interview, a number of them commented the conversations were the type they would like included in current ethics courses as they felt the topics dealt with real life predicaments which they could encounter at any point in their lives. As well, they highlighted that viewing films in the context of discussing a moral problem in class would be impactful to their understanding of their own moral perspectives. The conversations had provided them with opportunities to contemplate meaningfully on their present circumstances and gave them a wider perspective on the moral issues discussed. I found the feedback beneficial for conducting my own future research. After each participant's departure I saved the recording to my portable drive and spent a few minutes reflecting on the interview, made quick notes and reviewed my interview schedule.

Transcription

For the purposes of this study, the transcription was not done according to any formal conventions as I was not very familiar with them and they would not have contributed to the interpretation and analysis of the data. Due to medical reasons, I had some help with the transcriptions. A total of 398 hours were spent transcribing 155 319 words for the 15 interviews. The average number of words per transcript was 10 355 with the longest at 14 899 and the shortest at 8084 words. The length differed mostly because of participants' issues with recall and also due to fillers which punctuated almost every sentence for some of them.

I transcribed the first recorded interview, which was the lengthiest, without transcribing my questions, as a form of pre-test. I had set-up this first interview with an interval before the next so I was able to scrutinize the transcript, checking if questions needed refining, the line of questioning and tone of my voice with the participant's handling of the questions. I noticed two questions on the films were missed but the participant's prompt response to my subsequent email provided the answers to them. This recording and each subsequent one were later transcribed verbatim including the interviewer's questions. Pauses and indications of change in conversational tone were also typed in the transcript where they occur. Introductory portions of the interviews on what the study was about were excluded from the transcription. However, the use of Singlish discourse particles, grammatical structures, phrases, and dental fricatives in the interviews were maintained for authenticity to the participants' voices, as editing these may alter the meanings of the utterances. A participant had also lapsed into Mandarin occasionally but she said the Chinese proverbs and phrases were her thinking aloud in her ruminations and did not affect her responses so I did not have them translated and transcribed. The recordings were each transcribed in MS word document, which was copied to my personal laptop. Once these

were done, I checked again to ensure the transcripts were from the correct recordings for each participant and saved under the appropriate pseudonym. There were no other identifying marks on the recording and each was saved with a numeric code that corresponded to the order the participants were scheduled for the interviews as set out in the attendance list. As I was familiar with the gist of the conversation with my 15 participants, these checks were fairly quick. The transcripts were then imported to NVivo. As an organizing system, NVivo software enabled my three data sets to be stored for easy retrieval and also allows for secondary analysis of the data. Before coding, I re-listened to the recordings alongside re-reading the transcript. Listening to the recordings at the same time brought me back to a live “imagined conversation with the [participant] about the meanings in the text” (Kvale and Brinkmann 218) which allowed me to make additional notes for data analysis. I also re-listened to refresh my memory when analysing each transcript to situate the context in which the participant was discussing certain issues.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section provides an account of the general methods in content analysis employed in the data analyses of interview transcripts, film scripts, and questionnaires to answer my research questions. The formulation of the questions was based on a preliminary literature review, close study of the moral theories, and my film experiences in the pre-data collection stages. Phenomenological film analysis was used to evaluate the films from the participants’ points of view as indicated in the questionnaire data.

For addressing the research questions, an a priori coding frame based on the moral principles and standards as set out in the moral framework was devised for use in the content analysis. There was another coding frame which comprised a basic set of codes created according to the interview topics. New codes were then added onto the frame during the data

analysis as new categories emerged. The description for these categories were based on the participants' own definitions or statements about issues they had introduced in the interviews. All of the text-based data excluding the films were saved as three separate projects in NVivo for the reason that it would be too unwieldy with both emergent and a priori codes, as the software (according to my limited knowledge and experience) does not differentiate codes between sources if saved under a single project, even if each data set was saved under a different source. By separating the projects, running queries on NVivo to get the results was quicker and easier to compare across the data sets.

Preliminary data analysis began first with the films and film scripts which had informed the questions in the film questionnaires. Due to the short interval between the film screenings and the interviews, the initial analysis of the questionnaire data could not all be completed to refine questions in the interview schedule. Hence, a proper data analysis for both interviews and questionnaires commenced only after all the data were collected. A final analysis was done on the film scripts to check for any coding flaws. The analysis across the three text-based data sets was an iterative process as I went back and forth between them and the films, which was the fourth data set, to check for inaccuracies, interconnections, and corroborating evidence.

Guest et al. suggest two types of content analysis: confirmatory and exploratory. The former entails defining categories "prior to reviewing the data and then systematically searching the data for instances or expressions" of the categories, while exploratory type of analysis have no "predetermined categories" (254). In the data analysis, I used the exploratory type for the interview data as the transcripts were coded inductively first before applying the confirmatory analysis to them and to other data sets in the study. Thus, open coding, framed by the research questions and the topics, was done on the interview data, and themes were derived from a detailed analysis of the data which were further analysed. For

the film scripts, I applied only confirmatory analysis. Although coding for the questionnaires had inductive elements, the categories were structured by the questions. Coding was applied to single word(s), sentence(s) or phrase that best described the categories in all data sets. In rare instances, entire paragraphs had to be coded to contextualise the meanings in the statements about a particular phenomenon especially when participants changed their minds on their perspectives before arriving at a decision about them.

Interview Data

The data analysis for the interview transcripts conducted was to answer:

RQ 3: What are the associations/disassociations with morality in the films?

RQ 4: What are the audience's perspectives on moral issues?

RQ 4a: How does the audience associate/disassociate with each other in making sense of the moral issues?

Each transcript was read once over before conducting the analysis. I had picked an interview script randomly to conduct a preliminary analysis and had created parent nodes based on the a priori codes. I had decided to start by coding according to the a priori frame before applying inductive analysis. However, I constantly divagated into other themes that were apparent but did not fit the description of the coding frame. Therefore, I changed the strategy and saved the coded transcript into another project and deleted it from the main project where I had stored all the other interview data. I decided to start over by choosing a transcript to be analysed according to alphabetical order instead of the order in which the interview took place because I was still able to recall how some of the participants behaved at certain points in the interview and in the film screenings. Doing so enabled a fresh perspective on the

analysis. I did not want my impressions of the meetings to obfuscate the analysis so I could examine the data with no extraneous factors clouding my evaluation.

I looked at each portion of the transcript pertaining to each question asked and conducted open coding. This means I created some parent nodes, for the topics listed in the interview schedule, such as those for marriage, family, infidelity, and abortion.⁶⁴ For instance, statements related to abortion were coded at the parent node for it. As themes emerged with a logical connection to abortion, I created child nodes for each theme under the parent node. An example would be who has the right to decide when an abortion should be done. Child nodes were created for categories relating to individual rights, such as the mother, father, or foetus as expressed by the participant. In this way, there were node hierarchies to organize the emerging themes in the data. Statements that did not quite fit into any parent node yet were coded under a separate parent node for further analysis later. Illuminating quotes or interesting statements from the participants were coded *in vivo* to be revisited and memos were created for the source. But if a parent or child node applies to these statements, they would still be coded under the relevant topic. By creating parent and child nodes I could easily see where they corresponded to my interview schedule. For some themes which were not directly related to the topics in the interview schedule but considered relevant, open coding was also utilized and a parent node was created for it. An example would be the theme on law and society. For this category, I did not create child nodes for the two concepts because descriptions about them in the data generally refer to them as one entity. As the analysis progressed, and nodes were created as themes emerged in the data, the categories were “descriptive in nature” so key expressions regarding the phenomena could be identified and comparisons can be made “between two or more datasets,” so this type of inductive analysis is content driven (Guest et al. 257).

⁶⁴ Nodes in NVivo are a system for categorising data.

Next, I engaged in a second order of analysis. I looked at all the parent nodes and child nodes for statements that fit the a priori codes which were already set up in NVivo. I coded them under the parent node for each description that fits the moral principles according to each philosopher. For example, in the parent node for infidelity, perspectives on infidelity that were aligned to Kant's moral principles would be coded under a separate node that represents the impermissibility of infidelity under the humanity formula. Similarly, for the rest of the topics that fitted the description for virtue ethics and utilitarianism I did likewise, where applicable. I did this for all the nodes under the topics and coded them according to the a priori frame and creating more nodes when necessary. There were also some data relating to specific moral theories in the a priori frame that participants had mentioned and these were coded under Kant, utilitarianism or virtue ethics. I also created memos when there was incongruity between a participant's declaration and the responses to the questions. For instance, a participant claimed he was more aligned to a Kantian perspective but the responses in the interview indicated a utilitarian outlook. Therefore, this second order analysis allowed me to check for resulting frequencies of perspectives which point to a particular moral orientation and examine the inconsistencies.

Finally, I read through the transcript again and re-listened to the recordings to contextualise the statements and made inferences from the data. I also ran queries in between the analyses to identify recurrent themes and patterns, and deleting redundant nodes and combining some categories under another node which could better describe the data. These enabled me to search for interconnections as well when reviewing all that was coded to answer the research questions.

Questionnaires

The analysis for the questionnaire data was to provide supporting evidence to the films and supplement the interview data. The purpose was to check for specific associations or dissociations with the moral content; for instance, whether the support for a character's actions was aligned with individual response to the solution of the moral predicament. The analysis enabled me to explore the interconnections between the individuals' reception of the films in "how they perceived it, describe it, feel about it, judge it ... make sense of it" (Patton 115) to their moral perspectives. It would substantiate claims about the films' possible influences on moral perspectives by exploring the links between the questionnaire data analysis and the phenomenological analysis of specific scenes which participants found meaningful and to assess the associations with the films. Thus, the data analysis provided answers to:

RQ 2: How do the films engage the audience?

While I had no predetermined coding frame for the data, parent nodes were created according to the questionnaires and new codes were added as the analysis progressed. For example, data on film experiences were categorised under child nodes for positive and negative under the parent node for film experience. Codes were created based on film experience and meaningful scenes for each film only as extensive data on film characters and the moral issues were produced in the interviews. "Abductive inferences" (Krippendorff 42) for instance, that pertain to a character's nonverbal facial expression, might lead one to infer if s/he is lying, was not coded as I had used the questionnaire responses as conversation entries to probe for detail about this in the interview. An example of the inference is illustrated in a scene in *Age of Innocence*, when May tells Newland she had informed Ellen about her pregnancy but she was not pregnant at the time. Participants pointed out that she is lying based on the camera's focus on May's face and they wrote of being empathetic and

justified her action. This afforded the opportunity to probe for more detail into their moral perspectives on lying as they had previously equated infidelity with cheating/lying and thought it was morally wrong. Thus, the data analysis was constructive in providing supporting evidence of individual response to the possible influence of film on moral perspectives as well as checking for inconsistencies between data sets.

Film Scripts

I scrutinized data for the presence of moral principles as set out in the framework and in the “interval form”, which was to find the overall number of occurrences a particular moral principle is present, so the coding had deductive elements and is confirmatory in nature (Guest et al. 254). The analyses provided answers to:

RQ 1: What moral theories are present in each film?

From the code frequencies of positive moral characteristics that appear in the texts, the films’ dominant moral position can be deduced to answer:

RQ 1a: What is the dominant moral orientation of each film?

The coding units are the dialogue as these reveal the choices, decisions, and actions in the predicaments portrayed in the films. Themes and contexts in which they occur were evaluated to ascertain that precise codes in the framework were used. However, the analysis was challenging when coding for virtue ethics since the philosophy focuses on character traits that are manifested in habitual actions. As only manifest data in the form of dialogue could be coded, identifying these was limited, compared to dialogue that synchronised actions to either utilitarian or deontological positions. For instance, in coding for the virtue of friendship, I looked for evidence that the film character had acted consistently through a form of habit, by examining what other characters reveal as well. Because data in the scripts do not illustrate

the habitual formation of this trait the character is deemed to possess through consistent virtuous acts, and limited screen time does not allow for this development to occur through dialogue; to have a reasonable appreciation that a character has a virtuous disposition that strives towards some form of human flourishing in the duration of the film, the latent content needs to be interpreted by viewing the film for underlying meanings that are inferred by cinematic techniques which positions the character as being virtuous. In contrast, analysing and coding the data according to the moral principles of Kant and Mill were less demanding as dialogue usually precedes the corresponding action that follows or characters disclose their thoughts through dialogue in response to other characters' actions. In conducting the content analysis for the film scripts, I strived for objectivity as the data is manifested through the dialogue although there is a limit to assessing the validity of the analysis as what are analysed are determined by the subjective knowledge of the researcher. Hence, the next portion of the data analysis was necessary to provide an inclusive understanding of the moral phenomena by studying the films.

FILM ANALYSIS

There were two aspects to the analysis. First, the films were used to explore individual moral perspectives of two key issues: infidelity and abortion depicted in the films. For this part of the analysis, I considered individual perspectives within the moral framework to evaluate the moral arguments for the specific issues in the films. Second, since the focus was on the participants, the analysis centred on scenes which the most participants thought were meaningful to them and scenes that provoked the most responses. The second part of the analysis was needed to answer:

RQ 3: What are the associations/disassociations with morality in the films?

The scenes considered meaningful by the most participants were subjected to a phenomenological treatment based on the participants' descriptions of their film experiences. By looking at specific images from the films, I am "interrogating the process" by which the moral issues are presented and how they "represent (or in some cases challenge)" the prevailing notions of right and wrong moral conduct among the participants (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 281). The film analyses focused on the participants' "acts of perception as evaluative acts" and "the film as articulating its own ethical consciousness" (Stadler 78). The analyses examined how cinematography in the films established moral positions by engaging the audience to participate in the characters' moral predicaments specifically through camera shots, sound, lightning, action, and dialogue. The effectiveness of presenting moral positions is either enhanced by or detracted from the cinematic elements and techniques applied in the specific scenes. For instance, the presence of a narrator renders distance between the viewer and the viewed and any positive association for a specific character can be subverted and subsequent empathetic understanding of the character's predicament is reduced.

CHAPTER FOUR: *Age of Innocence* and *Cider House Rules*

OVERVIEW

The results in Chapters Four and Five present the participants' perspectives on moral issues portrayed in the five films. Through interactions with the films, the participants are experiencing the realities of the characters dealing with their predicaments. Whether they associate or disassociate with particular moral actions and outcomes point to the participants' worldviews about morality. Meanings that are derived by the participants in watching the five films illustrate their constructions of morality on issues that they identify with and deemed important according to their lived experiences. Through these constructions, the findings in these two chapters inform us of the participants' moral perspectives and the contexts in which their interpretations take place. The analyses of the five films interrogated how the cinematography work to produce meanings, which offer avenues for rumination and space to interpret and understand morality, while sometimes constrained by the limits placed by the films such that certain moral positions are privileged over others. The participants' (dis)engagements with the films are therefore dependent on the individual in relation to the content and how they are presented which illustrate the effects the films have on the study participants.

Where the audience is focused for instance, at a character, scene, moral issue because they find them the most meaningful are presented together with analyses of the moral actions within the moral philosophies and the cinematography through a phenomenological lens. For instance, in Chapter Five, key scenes in *The Bridges of Madison County* and *Revolutionary Road* were highlighted by the audience where their attention was mainly focused which created strong (dis)associations with the character(s), the moral issues surrounding infidelity

and marriage which contributed to the audience (dis)engagement with the films. Thus, the scenes in which these occur are presented for a contextual understanding of the processes in which interpretations take place. Similarly, for Chapter Four, (dis)associations with character and moral actions were primarily focused on Newland in *The Age of Innocence* and Homer in *The Cider House Rules*; hence, the film analyses coalesce around these characters to lend a contextual understanding of the audience reception. As the study privileged the participants' film experiences, some phenomenological reading of scenes were at times limited to the participants' own descriptions. Since I had watched the films with them, I incorporated my phenomenological responses at times with my own knowledge of the philosophical theories to place the participants' film experiences and assessments of the moral actions in context. These analyses answer RQ 2: How do the films engage the audience?

In the analyses of the five films, I amalgamated the participants' statements from the questionnaires and interviews to present a coherent account of the participants' experiences and their reflections about the films in order to understand the participants' moral perspectives. Issues the participants thought were significant were also evaluated. As an example, the theme of loyalty was thought to be a key issue relating to unfaithfulness in *The Cider House Rules* so it was incorporated into the analysis for the film. These were integrated with moral theories to illustrate the ways an action may be considered right or wrong. Scenes where a certain moral issue is presented that were most meaningful and/or reinforced perspectives were indicated in the analyses. These provided the answer to RQ3: What are the associations or disassociations with morality in the films? Some data analyses of the interview transcripts conducted answered RQ4: What are the audience's perspectives on moral issues? These pertain directly to the films which are also illustrated here to provide a more nuanced account of the participants' perspectives.

Reasons given for the engagement with films may be similar among some participants,

hence, only some quotes were presented. For instance, there were eight positive experiences of *Breaking Dawn*, but four were presented as the other four also indicated the wolves breaking their kinship ties to help the vampires contributed to their experience. The number of negative/positive film experiences did not always tie in with the most preferred/least preferred films as the latter categories provided the option for the participants to select only one for each category, whereas a participant could have several negative or positive experiences among the five films they watched in the study.

Two participants in the study did not indicate their film preferences although they described their positive and negative experiences of the films. Of these two participants, one said he preferred reading the books which these films were adapted from because they allow him to imagine and the other said she preferred to read fantasy books with a wider moral universe such as *The Lord of The Rings*.

The moral codings of the films as stated in Chapter Three was to discover what moral elements were present in the films according to the moral framework in the same chapter which point to dominant moral orientations of each film as a whole in relation to character actions and dialogue. They answer:

RQ1: What moral theories are present in each film?

RQ1a: What is the dominant moral orientation of each film?

Readers will find the moral arguments in the analyses fairly standard as they were presented according to the participants' deliberations on the moral predicaments. Additional works from Aristotle, Kant, Mill and those detailed in Chapter One, were incorporated in the analyses in certain scenes to make a case for the moral character /actions which were either supported or criticised by the participants. Moral arguments from contemporary philosophers that defend or argue against particular moral principles pertaining to specific moral issues in the films were omitted here as the study of this scope is not able to do full justice in presenting their moral positions.

Table 2 presents the results of the film codings according to the moral framework in Chapter Three which are present in the films and the dominant moral orientation of each film.

Table 2: Coding Results of Five Films

Moral Codes	<i>Age of Innocence</i>	<i>Cider House Rules</i>	<i>Bridges of Madison County</i>	<i>Revolutionary Road</i>	<i>Breaking Dawn Part 1</i>
Aristotle Virtues	10	06	12	06	02
Kant Principles	21	29	13	08	18
Mill Utilitarianism	05	15	0	04	09
Total Codes	36	50	25	18	29

How table two is derived is by examining moral action/character which corresponded to the specific moral theory for every major character in the film which is listed in the respective sections for ‘character codes’ in each film. Secondary characters are listed as ‘others’.

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

The Age of Innocence is the least preferred film among the participants. The pace of the narrative, character, and the narrator were factors that contributed to five negative film experiences. Two participants had watched the film prior to the study. Issues identified by the participants were: infidelity, sanctity of marriage, faithfulness, divorce, distinctions between appearance and reality, loyalty and deception, love and responsibility, women's rights.

The analyses of the scenes in this film according to the moral philosophers stated in Chapters One and Three, illustrate how meanings about moral actions are inscribed through the cinematography. They show how these work towards particular audience interpretations of the moral actions that the characters undertake in resolving their predicaments. The elements in the film have an effect in the audience's dis(associations) with Newland's actions in terms of (in)fidelity and marriage. At the same time, they surprise some of the audience about May's character towards the end of the film which raise questions about the justification of lies in order to preserve the status of family within the historical context of 1870s New York. As I show later, the pace of the film, language, although authentic to the historical setting, and Newland's inaction contributed to most participants disengaging with the film, although they associated with some of the moral elements in the film.

Newland's Predicament

The moral predicament in the film centres on the relationship between Newland and Ellen. Ellen is initially shunned by society because of her decision to divorce her Polish aristocrat husband. To complicate matters, if she goes ahead with the divorce, he threatens to circulate a letter that hints of her marital impropriety with his secretary but the latter and Ellen claim the allegation is untrue. It is revealed later that the count is actually the philanderer in the marriage. The upper class in New York frowns on divorce and extramarital

affairs but are more accepting of them when men like Beaufort, whom everybody knows, commits adultery. But while society accepts Beaufort as one of their own, even he is not spared the malicious insinuations about his paramours, among the men. It is only through the machinations of Newland's familial network that Ellen is accepted, when the van der Luydens, an influential family, hosts a party that includes her as a guest. She is also persuaded by Newland not to divorce her husband because of the ramifications for her family.

Since it is socially unacceptable for a woman to divorce even though legislation does not oppose it, Ellen and Newland could never marry while her husband is alive. Social convention, however, is agreeable to husbands and wives living discreet separate lives. As Newland is engaged, the first option, as some participants in the study said, is to assign Ellen's case to another partner in the law firm, avoid any more meetings with Ellen, postpone the wedding to May or cancel the engagement, in order for him in the interim to consider his true feelings for either of the women, and make a decision about them. The second option is to break off the engagement first, get Ellen to divorce her husband, elope with and/or marry her and start afresh somewhere else, which are the actions most of the participants advocate. The physical distance between them and New York society could ameliorate any unpleasant repercussions for their respective families over time. Breaking off one's engagement as soon as romantic feelings for another develop is the morally right thing to do as the participants maintained.

Instead, Newland seeks May out during her vacation to advance the wedding date. The audience at this point is given an inkling of May's suspicion about Newland and Ellen when she claims his feelings towards her have changed especially since the engagement, which coincides with Ellen's arrival in New York. At first, May demurs over Newland's suggestion and referenced his past romantic interest in Newport before they were engaged.

MAY: Whatever it may have been, Newland, I can't have my happiness made out of a wrong to somebody else. If promises were made or if you feel in some way pledged to this person, even if it means her getting a divorce, then Newland, don't give her up because of me.

At this juncture, Newland could have broken off the engagement as the participants pointed out. But he assures May there were no promises made which is the truth at the time, since neither Ellen nor Newland had articulated any romantic feelings for each other, although he appears resentful whenever Ellen is in the company of Beaufort. May then accepts his word there is no one else and the narrator interjects with a voice-over on Newland's thoughts about May, leaving the audience with the ambiguity of May's suspicion about his relationship with Ellen. The next scene, however, confirms Newland's romantic interest in Ellen even as he announces his plan to Mrs Mingott (grandmother of May and Ellen) to bring forward the wedding. On hearing that Ellen's husband wants her back, Archer says: "I'd rather see her dead," to which Mrs Mingott cautions: "We should remember marriage is marriage and Ellen is still a wife." Ellen comes into the house at this point. At the doorway, in an extreme close-up of their two faces, Newland asks her quietly when he can see her again. The camera then cuts to Ellen's house that same evening.

Newland and Ellen finally reveal their love for each other and kiss. This is the first instance the audience is shown that the relationship between them is more than friendship or kindness that Newland has extended to her as marks of solidarity in support of her. Newland confesses to Ellen that May guessed the truth about him having another woman in his life but she had guessed the wrong woman. The audience now knows that he deliberately lied to May. It is also inferred that Newland would not be happy if they are together when Ellen castigates him: "Isn't it you who made me give up divorcing? Didn't you talk to me here, in

this house, about sacrifice and sparing scandal, and for May's sake and for yours; I did what you *asked* me." Newland suggests that he could still be free of May but Ellen says it would be cruel of him to do so given that he has advanced the wedding date. Ellen seems resigned at this point with her declaration "Don't you see? I can't love you unless I give you up." She bursts into tears and Newland consoles her.

Figure 1: Newland and Ellen

From the medium shot of Newland and Ellen in Figure 1, their tight embrace without gaps in the physical space between them frames them as a single entity, which suggests that each is dependent on the other's existence to make them whole. The shot represents the divesting of previous barricades that mask their feelings and exposes their vulnerabilities to each other, conveying intimacy and trust. However, their unfocused gazes, Ellen's blank expression, and Newland's tense face also convey the futility of their relationship. And while Ellen's action can be interpreted as offering comfort, her upper body covering his and both her hands on his

back imply he is now subjected to her protective lead. His supplication pose supports this view. As demonstrated later in the narrative, he is the one pursuing her but has to wait for her cues on when to meet, as he tries to outmanoeuvre society's web-like scheming to prevent them from consummating their love. By the end of this scene, a telegram arrives to inform Ellen that May's parents have agreed to an early wedding. The camera's focus on their hands as the telegram is passed first on a platter by the maid to Ellen's hand then to Newland's, without their hands touching, connotes the situation is no longer within their control and breakup is imminent. The telegram bearing the news means the impending marriage is now the obstacle that prevents them from being together. The close-up of Ellen's downcast eyes as she reads, then passes the telegram to Newland in silence, illustrates an abject acceptance of her loss, since Newland must now marry May. As the camera moves from Newland's face to an extreme close-up of his hand crumpling the telegram, the dissolve to close-up to his face shows the dawning realization that he is now saddled with an even worse imbroglio.

The moral predicament Newland faces arises from his inability to make any sort of decision that could be construed as morally right when given the opportunity to do so. He is forewarned by May's hint about her stand on marriage and Mrs Mingott's reminder about Ellen's current marital status. They both lean towards a Kantian disposition on promise-keeping and marriage. According to Kant, a person has a perfect duty to keep one's pledge. Since May has offered Newland to rescind on their engagement, it would not be considered morally wrong to break his promise to her. Kant's conception of marriage relates to a conjugal cohabitation between spouses on a reciprocity basis which forbids a third party intrusion, especially when sexual infidelity is involved. In Mrs Mingott's view, while Ellen is still married, any infidelity by Ellen would also not be tolerated. Since Newland is not married yet, it would still be morally acceptable, once the telegram arrives, to break off the engagement as compared to proceeding with the wedding. He could still choose option two as

stated earlier. However, Newland's actions and his subsequent marriage cause he, Ellen, and May to live a lie.

Living a Lie

The shot in Figure 2 shows the audience that the wedding went ahead as it is not known what decision Newland made after receiving the telegram.

Figure 2: Inverted image of bride

The significance of the image is the absence of the groom which underpins that Newland is an unwilling participant in the wedding. The scene starts with a medium shot of the picture and as the camera zooms out of the inverted image of May in her wedding gown, it foretells the distant relations between her and Newland that would characterize their marriage. The inversion also subverts the notion of marriage as spouses in the film lead separate lives and are not shown in the film to share any form of reciprocity or mutual affection for each other,

although May has declared to Newland her love for him on a few occasions before the wedding. However, that love is now bound by marriage vows made on a foundation of deceit, brought about first by her own decision to believe Newland's lie, and his continued preoccupation with Ellen.

Six months into the marriage, Newland meets Ellen in Boston.

NEWLAND: I'm the man who married one woman because another one told him to ... You gave me my first glimpse of a real life. And then you told me to carry on with the false one. No one can endure that.

ELLEN: I'm enduring it.

The verbalisation of a false life conveys that his marriage is an artifice which lends greater significance to May's wedding picture framed upside down – Newland chose the wrong bride. At no point in the narrative does Newland attempt to fix his mistake but he continues to err. He lies to May in the carriage that his business meeting in Washington is postponed once he learns that Ellen would not be there, because Mrs Mingott had a stroke and has sent for Ellen. In the presence of May, Newland quickly offers to escort Ellen. In the following scene when he is accompanying Ellen to Mrs Mingott's, the audience knows that Ellen is still in love with Newland when they kiss in the carriage.

ELLEN: I think we should look at reality, not dreams.

NEWLAND: I just want us to be together.

ELLEN: I can't be your wife, Newland. Is it your idea I should live with you as your mistress?

NEWLAND: I want . . . somehow I want to get away with you and find a world where words like that won't exist.

ELLEN: Oh my dear . . . where is that country? Have you ever been there?

Is there anywhere we can be happy behind the backs of people who trust us?

NEWLAND: I'm beyond caring about that.

ELLEN: No, you're not. You've never been beyond that. I have. I know what it looks like. It's no place for us.

Newland is exasperated with not being able to advance his relationship further with Ellen. Because Ellen has been ostracised due to her initial divorce plan, she knows that beneath the veneer of politeness society presents outwardly, the truth is, any misstep would result in the entire family being snubbed. Although she loves Newland, she does not seek him out after his marriage, but takes precautions that they are not seen together when they do meet. Ellen's actions show her love, respect, and considerations of the well-being of her family which are in accordance with Kant's principles of virtues. Her words in the carriage also infer Newland would not be able to withstand the onslaught if they have an affair now since he is the product of the very social order that restricts their freedom of being together. They would be bound by the shackles of disapprobation no matter where they are and their respective families will bear the brunt of their indiscretion. As Mill notes in *On Liberty*, gossip and judgement are insidious tyrannies to an individual, "penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself" (91). In the dialogue, Ellen is astute in her assessment of Newland and the attendant consequences if they act on his dream of living elsewhere with her. Upset at her refusal, Newland leaves her halfway. After this scene, during a planned rendezvous at the art museum, Ellen capitulates to his insistence and agrees to have a one-time affair with him. But Newland is thwarted by May's news of her pregnancy and Ellen's plan to return to Europe.

According to some participants, this was the most erotic scene because the feelings were there but demonstrative only in the touching of hands which the audience could not

associate with in their present historical context. In the carriage, the conversation between Newland and Ellen demonstrates how Newland is focused on pursuing the relationship but Ellen reminds him of societal expectations regarding such relationships.

Moral Failings

By harbouring feelings for Ellen and taking opportunities to see her after he weds May, Newland has flouted a number of moral precepts. Firstly, he uses Ellen and May as mere means to achieve his own ends which is morally wrong under Kant's Humanity Formula. On the one hand, May represents the social world in which he was born into and in marrying her; he secures respectability for him and his family among the upper echelons of society. Ellen, on the other hand, shares his eruditeness and is cultured in taste. Thus, she assuages any privation of intellectual sophistication in his relationship with May as he realises May will never share his appreciation of literature and art. May possesses a girlish vacuity that leaves him cerebrally and emotionally shrivelled, with her domestic prattle and vapid observations about people, which bore him to fatigue. His actions are morally wrong because since he is already married, Ellen cannot possibly share equally in his need for her companionship. May cannot possibly agree to Newland being emotionally involved elsewhere in their marriage, while she protects his reputation and respectability among society. Moreover, his repudiation that there is another woman in his life when May permitted him to renege on the engagement denies her the autonomy to choose freely, had she known the truth of his feelings, between proceeding with the wedding or breaking off relations with him. Thus, her marriage is not based on her rational will but operating through the influence of Newland's lie.

Secondly, the consequence of his marriage is the unhappiness of both he and Ellen, which is perpetuated throughout the film, and possibly May's as well.⁶⁵ Act utilitarianism

holds the best outcome is measured if an act leads to general happiness that must be at least equivalent for the individual but Newland and Ellen are both miserable. If he had freed himself of May in the first instance, his action would achieve the best outcome for him and Ellen in terms of their future happiness. It would also permit May to find a more devoted spouse.

Thirdly, one can also surmise that Newland is not in the habit of cultivating the virtues of truthfulness and courage because he was not honest with May and he does not have the assurance to stop the wedding but is led by Ellen's intimation to proceed with it. Thus, his moral character is lacking in these virtues. Despite these moral failings, the results of the film codings illustrate Newland has some positive moral characteristics (see Table 3). It is important to note here that flouting of moral principles are not coded in the films as mentioned in Chapter Three since the aim is to investigate what moral theories are present and to uncover the dominant moral orientation of the film.

Table 3: Character Codes in *Age of Innocence*

Moral Codes	Newland	Ellen	May	Others	Total
Aristotle Virtues	2	3	0	5	10
Kant Principles	9	4	3	5	21
Mill Utilitarianism	1	2	1	1	5
Total Codings					36

Character Codes

Newland: Most of his actions are centred on Kant's imperfect duties to self and to others such as benevolence and sympathy pertaining to his efforts in arranging for Ellen's

⁶⁵ The audience is only shown May as a happy bride early in her marriage but it is only later in the narrative she may have suspected Newland and Ellen.

acceptance into society. He fulfils one parental and one spousal obligation towards his family which is in accord with the participants' assessment of his actions regarding those duties.

Participants stated they do not agree with the narrator that he is a "faithful husband" but conceded that he may have been after Ellen leaves New York. Hence, some participants thought the scene in Paris when he did not see Ellen shows his faithfulness. There was one coding under the Principle of Utility for internal sanction. This relates to Newland's conscience when he tries to tell May after they are married about his feelings for Ellen. There were two codings according to Aristotelian virtues of friendship, extended to Ellen at the time when society shunned her company.

Ellen: The virtues are centred on wit and friendship. The former relates to the repartee between Newland and Ellen at the van der Luydens' party. It is also inferred throughout the film of her wit in her interactions with others, which is part of the reason Newland finds her refreshing, compared to May. Ellen also extends friendship to Regina, the disgraced first wife of Beaufort when his business collapses due to his fraudulent dealings. She was kind to Annie who is the daughter from Beaufort's second marriage when he sends her to Paris where Ellen lives after she left New York. This information is given by Ted, Annie's fiancé and Newland's son. The Kantian codings were on Ellen's respect for persons and being faithful in her own marriage before she left her husband despite his extramarital affairs. There were two codings of Principle of Utility for internal and external sanctions which refer to her conscience and the avoidance of societal disapproval regarding her relationship with Newland.

Others: Virtues of friendship, honour, justice were coded for the van der Luydens, with Mrs Mingott coded for the virtues of wit and generosity. The latter alludes to her giving Ellen an

allowance for Ellen to live in Paris after she leaves New York, as the count had cut Ellen off financially. The Kantian codings centred on the families' benevolence towards Ellen initially. The secretary's urging Newland not to let Ellen return to the count is coded as the perfect duty for respect of a person. The secretary informs Newland that Ellen is the wronged spouse in the marriage so he feels it is his duty to get Newland and the family to influence Ellen since the count will continue to be unfaithful to her. Coding from utilitarianism pertains to society plotting for the successful eviction of Ellen from New York so that the marital union between Newland and May is preserved.

May: Codings were according to Kant's principles of fulfilling spousal and parental duties but these were not picked up by the participants. One instance is demonstrated by May's concern for Newland's well-being and another is when she nursed their second son, Bill, through a bout of infectious pneumonia which results in her death. Another Kantian code applies to when she offers Newland the chance to break off the engagement in an act of benevolence, considered "noble" by Ellen. There was one coding for act utilitarianism which is a lie to Ellen that causes the latter to leave New York. May's action creates the best outcomes for her and her family with the support of society.

Newland's Moral Inertia

Although Newland has the highest amount of moral codings, his lack of decisive action was one contributing factor to the film being the least preferred among the participants. Throughout the film, it appears that Newland is sleepwalking through a quagmire of moral choices presented to him through various opportunities but he fails to make a definitive decision with his own moral convictions. This is perceived as a lack of motivation on his part and that his actions are instrumented through the desires of others.

As Mill notes in *On Liberty*:

The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice.

He who does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice. He gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best... The faculties are called into no exercise by doing a thing merely because others do it, no more than by believing a thing only because others believe it. (133)

The failure to exercise his own indiscretion and the courage to lead his own life despite impediments create barriers to understanding Newland's motivation for pursuing Ellen. While most participants felt that Ellen and Newland should be together as there is a "genuine connection" and that their relations "felt like soulmates," an example of disengagement with the film is reflected in the following statement.

Freda, 28, Freethinker, female said:

I feel that the film did not present enough grounds/evidence on why they are attracted to each other. They are not able to give up their all to be with each other and as an audience, I'm not convinced on the strength of their love.

Even though Freda claims she had a positive film experience because *Age of Innocence* is a "lovely period film of love, prejudice, and social norms," what she discussed in the interview below echoed the dissatisfaction of some participants about Newland vacillating between his inertia and his pursuit of a real life.

Freda: The period one is a bit wishy-washy

I⁶⁶: Which one?

Freda: The period one. Ellen

I: Ah, *Age of Innocence*. Wishy-washy as in terms of ...?

Freda: Yeah, *Age of Innocence*. It's like Ai mai, ai mai⁶⁷... you want or you don't want, you want or you don't want -- so many times, nothing happens still.

Commenting on the relationship between Ellen and Newland, Athlyn, aged 23, Atheist, female said:

[It] "just felt that it's a passionate relationship ... very hard to sympathise with either of their characters because they both felt very distant ... wasn't very privy to their feelings, just had the notion that they really wanted each other."

These factors contribute to a less than satisfying denouement to the moral predicament as we do not see any resolution that stems from Newland's own actions in the course of the narrative. In addition, his decisions, when he makes them, leave much to be desired. Even though Frey, aged 21, Freethinker, female, claimed the film modified her view because the film depicts the importance of pursuing personal freedom and desires, she says in the interview that the film is "boring":

Frey: (*laughs*) *Age of Innocence*. Cos to me, it was just very unrealistic.

I: What was unrealistic?

⁶⁶ I = Interviewer

⁶⁷ The phrase is in Hokkien which is a Chinese dialect; denotes indecision. Literal translation 'want, don't want'.

Frey: I thought that Newland had a lot of chances to get out of it. He could still have gotten out of it. He had a lot of interactions with Ellen he should have avoided.

I: (*laughing*) Why?

Frey: It just felt like he was trying to be dutiful, but at the same time he was trying to make decisions that might lead him astray.

Hence, while Freda and Frey associated with the issues portrayed in the film, Newland's character and his inertia regarding his predicament contributed to some participants disengaging with the film. In contrast, the following scene between May and Newland provided some relief from the inaction for the participants. In reference to the following scene, Frederick, 25, Freethinker, male, said: "[it] woke me up from the monotonous plot."

I told her I was pregnant but I was not

The following scene (Figures 3.1 – 3.10) occurs in the library at Newland and May's house after hosting their first dinner as a wedded couple. At the dinner, Ellen and Newland are circumvented from being alone as the guests claim their respective companies separately. As Ellen is leaving, Newland tells her he will see her very soon in Paris. The close-up of Newland's face registers his foreboding when Ellen includes May in the intended visit. This cues the audience that something is amiss when Newland is also prevented from further conversation with her as the van der Luydens, flanking Ellen on each side, escort her out the door. The camera lingers on Newland's face watching Ellen, as he absently bids farewell to other guests walking past him. Inside the carriage, Ellen stares straight ahead. This is the last time Newland sees Ellen.

The library scene begins with an establishing shot of Newland alone in his library which occurs at 1:57:23, near the end of the film. This scene, I suggest, is the turning point in

the film as it resolves Newland's predicament for him. In so doing, the film offers what is essentially a Kantian position on spousal and parental obligations but the fulfilment of those come about through a lie on May's part to oust Ellen from Newland's life.

In Figure 3.1 May wants to discuss the successful outcome of hosting the dinner and asks permission tentatively to come into the library. Her permission seeking, coupled with the spatial distance between them, illustrates the reserved spousal relations. She is positioned as the interloper here in Newland's sanctum and the recurrent obstacle to Newland's happiness when juxtaposed with the scene of Ellen and Newland in Figure 1.

Figure 3.1: May permission seeking

The confrontational pose and upright postures in Figure 3.2 coupled with the awkward silence and the absence of non-diegetic music emphasise the tense atmosphere. Newland makes no attempt to close the distance even though there is a chair beside May. The spatial distance between them becomes a visual metaphor in Figure 3.2 which serves to implicate

the audience in understanding how alienated Newland must feel with May, as it throws into sharp focus the cold politeness that exists between them, which is the antithesis of the demonstrative type of love with Ellen in Figure 1.

Figure 3.2: Silent confrontation between Newland and May

At the same time, perceptual ascription is focused on May as she does not select the chair next to Newland. This and her permission seeking imply she has been on the periphery of Newland's affections and attention in their marriage, as her behaviour marks her as a guest in her own home. In other words, her presence is subjected to his invitation and his tolerance. This arouses some empathy for her. By keeping Newland and May in the same frame with both characters placed at an equal distance to the audience's view in Figure 3.2, the audience is called to consider two subjective points of view as the dialogue unfolds. But the positioning of May, seated slightly closer to the camera, hence, to the audience, privileges her.

Newland starts the conversation (Figure 3.3). As he speaks, perceptual activity is centred on Newland and the audience feels he is on the cusp of resolving his predicament. The audience is implicated in his real thoughts for once, without the intrusion of the narrator, about the extent of the suffocation in his relationship with May.

NEWLAND: (hesitantly) If you feel up to it May, there is something I've been wanting to talk to you about. And I tried to talk to you the other evening.

Newland is referring to a previous conversation where he wanted to divulge his feelings for Ellen after she agreed to have an affair with him. May had brushed him off with the news that Ellen plans to leave for Europe. In the dialogue below, it is unclear if May deliberately misreads his meaning to leave her, however, she mentions Europe which indicates she must know he wants to be with Ellen.

Figure 3.3: Newland initiating the break

MAY: Oh yes, there's something about yourself?

NEWLAND: About myself, yes. So difficult to find the right words.

(starts fidgeting with his wedding ring)

But it's just that I feel so terribly tired ... at the moment. And I think ... each day ... a little more so. And I think it would be better for everyone if I were to make a break.

MAY: You mean give up the law?

NEWLAND: Well, certainly that will be a part of it and also just to – just to get away. I'd like to do some travelling.

MAY: Oh. Europe or ...?

NEWLAND: Perhaps even farther.

MAY: How far?

NEWLAND: I don't know. I thought...I thought India or Japan...

He is not forthcoming about the destination and his words suggest he does not intend to leave the marriage but have an affair with Ellen which causes empathetic engagement to shift to May.

The scene invites the audience to share its perspective on the two characters as they interpret the sequences with the camera alternating between the POV⁶⁸ shots of the two characters. Up to this point the film focuses on Ellen and Newland which are framed within the context of a romantic relationship; but in this scene, director Scorsese shifts the focus for the audience to consider the primacy of familial responsibilities. As Stadler points out, it is “the unique ability of film to locate the spectator in the interchangeable positions of the one seeing and the one being seen” and the “cinematic techniques invite a shifting intersubjective experience” in which we share the perspectives of certain characters (152). By alternating

⁶⁸ Point-of-view

between points-of-view, the film does not, however, impose a preferred reading on the audience that family is of importance. Rather, towards the end of scene, the revelation of May's lie invites the audience to evaluate if the lie is morally acceptable to the idea that family duties override individual needs.

Figure 3.4: May's POV

Both characters in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 also do not appear together in the same frame as the camera alternates between each character's perspectives. So the audience is invited to consider each character's perspective, and experience through each character, the effect of the words on the other. I felt myself holding my breath with May's long pause as the camera is on her as she stands up.

MAY: As far as that? Well... (gets up slowly)

The scene takes on a menacing turn as the camera cuts to Newland's astonishment at May's directive couched in dulcet tones (Figure 3.5).

MAY: (cont'd) I'm afraid you can't, dear ... (walking towards him)
That is, if the doctors will let me go. I'm afraid they won't. I've been
sure of something since this morning and I've been longing to tell you...

Figure 3.5: Newland's POV

The shot of Newland in Figure 3.5 registers his dread and he does not look at her face as the crushing news about May's pregnancy sinks in. With May almost towering over Newland in Figure 3.5, he has to tilt his head back to gain some space from her, almost as if he was cowering from her. The implication is that he has to muster courage to proceed with his travel plan now, as May continues speaking. He has no chance to interrupt as he is still processing her news.

May's smile in Figure 3.6 shows her confidence that the news ensures Newland will stay. May must have seen, as the audience does, Newland's shocked reaction to her news, as she is standing looking down at him, but she chooses to ignore it, just as she had brushed off his attempts to discuss Ellen previously when he planned the affair. Her authoritative pose while he is seated upsets the power relations in their relationship and the Aristotelian view of marriage. Aristotle argues that the husband, "fitter for command," rules and "the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying," to promote the marital good (*Politics* 1253b; 1259b; 1260a). Throughout the marriage, although legally his wife, May appears to be the 'other' woman as Newland is preoccupied with Ellen, and May appears to be compliant with the situation even if she suspects. But he is now recoiling from May's triumphant assertion of her rights as a wife and mother. Without Ellen in the country, May's pregnancy shackles Newland to May so she wrests back control of her marriage and family.

Figure 3.6: May's revelation

Newland is speechless as she sinks down in front of him and puts her face on his lap (Figure 3.7). May does not see Newland's reaction, but the utter devastation the news does to him is shared by the audience for a brief moment. The physical entrapment by May holding onto him with her upper body so he cannot extricate himself signifies no possible avenues of escape for him to be with Ellen. His despair does not last long however. The audience can almost hear his thoughts, as the camera closes on his face, on planning to proceed with his travel plan when he asks May quietly if she has told anyone else about the pregnancy. Ellen might not agree to be with Newland when a child is on its way. May's voice is tremulous when she discloses that Ellen knows as she had told Ellen during a long talk with her one afternoon. This was after Ellen had agreed to the affair with Newland. The tension is palpable for the audience as May's disclosure hits Newland.

Figure 3.7: Newland's despair

NEWLAND: I thought you just said you weren't sure till today.
(stops stroking her head and withdraws his hand)

MAY: (makes an inaudible sound) No. I ... I wasn't sure then. But I told her I was. (looks up) And you see. . . I was right.

In Figure 3.8, May looks up at Newland as she utters the last line as if confirmation of her pregnancy mitigates the falsehood.

Figure 3.8: May's disclosure

Then she smiles twice at Newland. This causes the audience to shift perspective from one of empathy to derision of her as the camera focuses on Newland's POV after the disclosure (Figure 3.9). His silence and the grim set of his lips show his repulsion and the audience is implicated in Newland's judgement of her lie.

Because the film portrays May in the beginning as an ingénue, seemingly without guile right up to this point in the film, the audience is unprepared for the disclosure. We only know May through Newland's point of view as articulated by the narrator; hence, the duplicity of her action is constructed by the film as an element of surprise for the audience to

consider the justification of May's lie, which is to keep the family together. This moment in the scene provokes the audience into considering the moral implications of certain actions in the marital and familial contexts within a specific socio-cultural, historical period.

Figure 3.9: Newland's reaction

The entire scene ends at 2:01:45, taking just over four minutes of screen time. This includes a high angle shot of Newland and May (Figure 3.10) with him fingering his wedding band while May is still in the kneeling position. The high angle shot has a voyeuristic effect and can be read two ways.

The first reading, to return to Aristotle's quote on spouses, May's submissiveness to that of Newland's authoritative posture here restores the normalcy of their marital relationship. The shot engages the audience to view this couple adhering to societal norms about how a married couple should behave as society views them. In actual fact, May is the one making all the decisions for him, and even though May is placed at a lower position, she is now in command of their marital union as her act results in preserving the family's

reputation. When compared to Figure 1, the contrast between the two shots is remarkable. If you recall, Newland is in the supplicating position in Figure 1 which upsets societal expectations of men in their relationships with women. Men have the impunity to conduct extramarital affairs. Thus, Figure 1 and the first reading of Figure 3.10 anchor the view that Newland never took any decisive actions, particularly concerning the two women.

Figure 3.10: May and Newland

Figure 3.10 also augments the framing of Newland and May in Figure 3.2 as two distant people with May still trying to bridge the divide here, but their relationship will never share the same level of reciprocal intimacy as Newland has with Ellen. This reading supports the participants' notion that Newland was not decisive in taking any action to resolve his predicament while they were empathetic to his relationship with Ellen. A second reading, according to the participants, is also a possible outcome for Newland since he would not be flouting any moral principles according to Mill.

The second reading of Figure 3.10 suggests May is implicitly pleading for him to remain in the marriage and face his responsibilities in light of her pregnancy, while Newland's clasped hands suggests his denunciation of her. If Newland decides to leave for Paris now, from a utilitarian point of view, his action would be permissible if he does not relinquish his financial obligation towards the child. According to Mill, it is only when "a person violate[s] a distinct and assignable obligation to any other person or persons, the case is taken out of the self-regarding class, and becomes amenable to moral disapprobation (*On Liberty* 152)." Since Newland's leaving does not constitute harm to the child, it should not be subjected to any interference as society does not disapprove of men having affairs. But just as the audience thinks there is a remote possibility he might still leave May, the camera closes on Newland and follows his gaze with a close-up of his side profile.

The camera starts to pan slowly with the narrator's voice-over and the camera continues to pan to a scene with Newland and May, slightly older, bearing witness to their first child's christening in the same room. The editing with the seamless transition to the next scene of Newland's expanding family suggests that the predicament is resolved – he becomes a faithful husband and a dutiful father as the narrator says.

Reflections on character actions

Newland's lie to May about meeting Ellen in the carriage and the revelation of May's lie provided the most thoughtful reflections from the participants even if they did not agree with May's actions. Agatha, aged 33, Agnostic, female, describes May as a "cold, manipulative bitch." On the whole, the participants understood that May's lie was to protect her family, so their sympathy for her has utilitarian overtones. May's action brings the greatest happiness for her and their respective families. Ironically, May's lie, considered blameworthy according to Kant, even if it did no apparent harm to Newland or Ellen as they

went about their separate lives, results in Newland fulfilling his duties as a father and husband in the Kantian sense. Interestingly, while participants said Ellen should divorce, none advocated the option here for either May or Newland. Buena, 20, Buddhist, female, wrote in the questionnaire:

Divorce means a new life for both parties. But if divorce as a result of an affair is not right for the 'victim' of the divorce ... it will be very hurtful and unfair for May – she pays the price for Newland's mistake as she has devoted herself to the relationship.

Disengagement with *The Age of Innocence*

The problem with the Narrator

The ramblings of the narrator in lengthy detail about the intricacies of social customs, descriptions of food and tableware, are at times unnecessary as these are illustrated through the cinematography. As a device, the use of the off-screen narrator in *The Age of Innocence* interferes with the enjoyment of the film as it destabilises the audience's involvement with the characters. Further, by intruding into the audience's thoughts when they are in the process of understanding the nuances of character actions and making judgements about them, makes it challenging for the audience to distinguish whether something is seen through the omniscient or Newland's POV. An example of this is at the dinner both Newland and May hosted.

NARRATOR: He guessed himself to have been, for months, the centre of countless silently observing eyes and patiently listening ears. He understood that, somehow, the separation between himself and the partner of his guilt had been achieved. And he knew that now the whole tribe had rallied around his wife. He was a prisoner in the centre of an armed camp.

The narration here frustrates the actual audience on how Newland arrives at such a conclusion because throughout the film, the point about society playing a part in separating Newland and Ellen is not explicitly depicted. The audience understands this piece of narration at this point in the film, when taking into context character's action through May's revelation about her pregnancy, which follows this scene. Also, the behaviour of the dinner guests in the narration scene, when this voice-over occurs, appears customary and nothing untoward is exchanged among them. There is no indication too that Newland had guessed this from earlier events. Thus, when sources of information are conflated and become indistinguishable, the audience is frustrated.

Most of the time, Newland's internalization of his feelings is narrated which leads the audience to question the authenticity and depth of his emotions. For instance, after meeting Ellen in the carriage, he ruminates on May through the narrator and the audience is not repulsed by Newland's ideation because it is voiced in the third person.

NARRATOR: But then he realized, I am dead. I've been dead for months and months. Then it occurred to him that she might die. People did. Young people, healthy people, did. She might die, and set him free.

While the narration has its uses in giving context to the narrative especially with the large number of secondary characters and in providing exposition to the ellipsis, Augusta, 22, Agnostic, female, said the effect of the narrator on her was akin to being read "a bedtime story" due to the languorous tone. Three participants listed the narrator as the reason for the film being their least preferred. Frey, 21, Freethinker, female, said:

Okay, the narrator was this old British lady who talks in very British sentences ... it was very difficult to listen to her. Sometimes, when she says something, you know it's like one of those sentences where you have to hear

it in entirety before you understand it. So, by the time, I hear the end of the sentence, I've already forgotten the first part of the sentence because the sentences are very long... I didn't get the movie at some points... And sometimes, I just miss out, or forgot what she said at the start. What was the point again, something like that.

Participant Buffy, 20, Buddhist, female, elaborated in the interview:

narration which kinda pulls me out from the movie, from being immersed in the story. Like, you see them talking halfway, and then got the narration at the back, and then they change scenes, so you feel detached from that movie.

Buffy, who had a negative experience added: "Not my cup of tea, a little draggy... I don't like random narrations between scenes."

Listing the film as his least preferred, Cato, 24, Catholic, male said: "It's a very slow film...the way it's told, and the scene and the way they speak."

Although Agnes, 22, Agnostic, female said she had a negative experience because it was "very frustrating because of how everyone speaks...saying things they don't actually mean," she listed it as her most preferred film because she is a fan of Daniel Day Lewis who portrays Newland. She explained: "I really like the historical, period kind. Like, this gilded age...very interesting period."

For Athlyn, 23, Atheist, female, the film is "just not relevant to today's times."

(Dis)associations with morality

Although the film modified only one person's moral perspective, a participant said the film questions his views on marriage and loyalty while another said it challenges his

perspective on extramarital affairs and the extent that they can be considered wrong. There were positive comments about Ellen's moral character depicted through her consideration for others. Ellen is described as brave, selfless, independent, and a heartbroken woman. Although Ellen possesses a lesser number of positive moral characteristics (Table 3), she is not actively pursuing Newland but stays away once he is married.⁶⁹ The fact that she was still married when in love with Newland was an insignificant point for most participants, as she was on the verge of divorce and would have proceeded if Newland had not discouraged her.

While the participants agreed that Newland and Ellen were compatible as there were passion and intensity in their connection, they thought that the relationship between Newland and Ellen was morally wrong from the outset as Ellen is married and Newland is engaged and they felt there were options to remedy the situation. Hence, their perspectives of infidelity are oriented towards Kantian principles. Because of Newland's inaction, identification with his predicament was also limited. The participants did not support Newland even though he has dominant codings from Kant's moral precepts as they pertain mostly to imperfect duties, which were not significantly prominent in the film for the audience to associate with. However, while sympathetic to the romantic situation between Newland and Ellen, they concurred that Newland staying with the marriage was right.

Agnes, 22, Agnostic, female, while acknowledging it was "tragic" to stick to the "veneer of lies and inauthenticity" in staying in his marriage, it was the right thing for Newland to do; hence, some chose the last scene in Paris as a representation of his faithfulness to May by not renewing ties with Ellen. Only Noland, aged 22, Non-denominational, male, one of the two participants who cited the film as his most preferred, appreciated the struggle Newland went through. He said "The fact that Newland accepted that

⁶⁹ She also has lesser screen time than Newland in the film so positive moral characteristics are limited.

he couldn't be with Ellen...that's something really difficult to do" even though Noland supported the view that infidelity is wrong. The strong association with the Kantian view of marriage overrode some of the participants' disassociation with lying in the pregnancy scene. Thus, the participants' associations with the film's dominant Kantian orientation was attributed to Ellen's moral actions and the film's moral position on marriage and parental responsibilities.

THE CIDER HOUSE RULES

The film had the highest number of codings of all the films in this study (Table 4). Participants listed *The Cider House Rules* as their most preferred film which corresponded to 11 positive film experiences. Issues identified by the participants were: (ethics) of abortion, substance abuse, casual sex, (lack of) family, domestic violence/rape, incest, adoption, fraud, lies, ethical work behaviour, race and segregation. All 15 participants selected scenes that were meaningful to them. Due to the film having myriad issues, the selections differed vastly among them and some participants listed more than one meaningful scene. While the film only modified three perspectives, three other participants said the film reinforced their pro-abortion views and one said the film strengthened her notions that disloyalty and incest are wrong.

Table 4: Character Codes in *Cider House Rules*

Moral Codes	Larch	Homer	Candy	Others	Total
Aristotle Virtues	0	1	0	5	6
Kant Principles	6	19	0	4	29
Mill Utilitarianism	10	2	2	1	15
Total Codings					50

Character Codes

Others: The Aristotelian virtues were coded mainly for Wally in extending friendship and kindness to Homer by offering him a job and place to stay. In the film, he is also depicted as a benevolent person and is brave to volunteer for a dangerous flying mission in Burma during the war. One act of generosity by nurse Angela refers to giving money to Homer when he

chooses to leave St Cloud's. The Kantian codes pertained to the nurses' actions in caring for the children at the orphanage. Buster's lie to the children about Fuzzy being adopted was coded as act utilitarianism. Buster lied to prevent the children grieving for Fuzzy if they know he died.⁷⁰ The rest of the Kant codings referred to the children's words to each other that the nurses and Dr Larch fulfil their responsibilities as parents to them at St Cloud's, in place of their own.

Candy: Two codings according to act utilitarianism pertain to her relationship with Homer that relieves her loneliness when Wally went off to war.

Dr Larch: Coded with eight references to act utilitarianism. They were derived mainly from his actions in forging Homer's medical qualifications and substituting the heart x-ray as well as terminating unwanted fetuses. Two actions coded according to the greatest happiness principle pertain to instructing Buster to lie about Fuzzy's death to the children and in giving people what they want, which is either an orphan or an abortion. The six Kantian codings refer to his parental love and responsibilities to Homer, in developing Homer's talents, and his caregiving duties to the children.

Homer: Kantian codings pertain to the perfect duty in respecting others' autonomy to choose, for example, Rose's decision about her baby, Candy's decision regarding her relations with him and Wally and Homer's sympathy for Candy when Wally is paralysed. He has one coding from the Universal Law of Nature and one for the Kingdom of Ends formula. These refer to his stance regarding the potential life of a foetus. In the film, he chooses to deliver babies at the orphanage until he performs Rose's abortion. Other codings were from his displays of gratitude for acts of kindness towards him. The virtue of even temper coded under Aristotle pertain to Homer's control of his hurt and anger when Candy is indecisive

⁷⁰ Buster and Fuzzy are also orphans at St Cloud's. Fuzzy needs a breathing apparatus and his medical condition was acquired at birth due to an alcoholic mother.

about choosing between Wally and him, as he shows moral reasoning through his deliberation on the right action. Two codings under act utilitarian comprise performing Rose's abortion and helping Candy through her loneliness during Wally's absence.

Moral Transgressions

Homer meets Wally and Candy when the couple arrives at St Cloud's for the latter to have an abortion. Homer then leaves the orphanage with them. It is disclosed later that Candy's reason for the abortion is because she is not good being alone much less have a baby while Wally is away. She does want children later. During the journey to Wally's apple orchard, Wally offers Homer a job as an apple picker and also a place to stay. The film depicts the two of them together, sometimes with Candy as well, enjoying their close friendship. Soon after Wally leaves for the war, Candy and Homer start a sexual relationship. After their first sexual encounter, Candy tries to justify it by reasoning, more to herself than to Homer, with reference to Wally: "He just leaves me here, what does he want? He wants me to just wait for him? He knows me; he knows I'm not good being alone." She continues as she steps into the car with Homer: "This is right. I *know* this is right." Homer assents absent-mindedly. Her words indicate that she thinks having sex with Homer is wrong, whereas Homer does not react the same way as he is infatuated with her, even before they meet in person. They had driven past him on the way to the orphanage and from his expression as he glanced at her he seemed enamoured then.

In earlier scenes in their journey to the orchard, it is inferred Homer admires Wally's courage because he volunteers for the war as Homer cannot enlist due to a heart condition. Wally, in turn, is impressed by Homer's medical knowledge. Thus, their relationship is based on the Aristotelian definition of mutual admiration and both share mutual advantage and pleasure in each other. Homer needs a job; and Wally needs help with the harvest. Both also enjoy each other's companionship. Aristotle considers a friendship based on mutual

admiration more valuable because it is centred on the intrinsic qualities of each person. This type of relationship is less ephemeral as there is goodwill between both.⁷¹ Therefore, on Aristotle's view, Homer's relationship with Candy is a moral transgression against Wally, but Homer did not flout any moral prohibition. However, according to Kant, premarital is also not permissible even though Homer is romantically unattached when he meets Candy who is also unmarried. Kant argues that sex cannot be separated from the whole person because to do so would be treating oneself and one's partner as mere means. This violates the categorical imperative: "If one partner yields to the other his person ... and all his circumstances, to have right over them, and does not receive ... a corresponding identical right over the person of the other, then there is an inequality here" (*Lectures on Ethics* 159). In Kant's view, equal rights are reciprocated through marriage. Hence, the relationship between Candy and Homer is morally wrong according to Kant.

Homer also has a duty to repay Wally through acts of kindness in ways that are more than what Homer has received from him. But Homer has no obligation to Candy even if one accepts that Wally means to include Candy under Homer's care. Kant notes, in reference to one's imperfect duty to self: "If one person is closer to me (in the duty of benevolence) than another, I am obligated to show greater benevolence to the one than to the other" (*Ethical Philosophy* 116). Wally's regard for Homer even when he's shipping out and likely to be killed in the war is demonstrated in the following dialogue. As Wally remarks to Homer and his mother, Homer is overqualified for the job as he and Candy witnessed at St Cloud's, Homer is medically trained to deliver a baby. Hence, Wally worries if Homer might be wasting his skills at the orchard.

WALLY: You get along ok?

HOMER: Yeah

⁷¹ For an extended discussion on friendship, see *Nicomachean Ethics*.

WALLY: Guess what?

HOMER: What?

WALLY: I'm shipping out today. A little sooner than I expected but I wanted to make sure you've settled and happy enough considering ... Are you bored stiff? Or you think you can stick it out a bit?

HOMER: Yeah of course. I'm grateful for the job, Wally.

WALLY: I'm grateful too. Gives me some peace of mind knowing that you're here keeping an eye on things.

HOMER: Well, that's good.

(cont'd) Ah...Look Wally, thanks. I'm lucky I met you.

WALLY: *I'm* the lucky one.

HOMER: No really. I'm lucky.

Interpretations of Infidelity and Loyalty

In the dialogue between Homer and Wally, some participants rationalised whether Wally inferred that Homer is to include Candy in his care while he is gone. A few debated that Wally may not have meant Homer to be romantically involved with Candy but for her to be accorded care and attention as Homer did after Candy's abortion. It is also highly probable Wally is only referring to Homer's help with the orchard as there was an imperceptible nod to their surroundings, which some participants may have missed, when he speaks to Homer about taking care of things. The participants thought Wally a kind person to offer hospitality and work to Homer, so they felt it was disloyal of Homer to have a relationship with Candy. The participants considered the relationship a betrayal of trust and Candy's act as morally reprehensible, more so than for Homer. Others argued that the point

about Wally knowing Candy needing to be with someone, needs amplification to consider if her transgression might be morally permissible.

Athlyn said it was “hard to form any kind of moral judgment” about the relationship as Candy ending the relationship with Homer to look after Wally is “admirable.”⁷²

The rest of the participants thought the relationship between Candy and Homer were inexcusable as Wally did no wrong.

Batista, 23, Baptist, male, said the relationship was “immoral.”

Tami, 22, Taoist, female: “I don’t think it’s morally right for Candy or Homer to be together... I feel that trust and loyalty are very important in a relationship.”

Cato said the relationship was wrong because “loyalty is of utmost importance.”

Some felt Candy’s actions were considered morally wrong as compared to Homer.

Burnette, 22, Buddhist, female, said Candy “took advantage” of Homer.

Frey thought the relationship happened because of Candy’s “sheer neediness.”

Noland surmised that Homer was “used by Candy.”

The majority of the participants objected to the relationship between Candy and Homer because of the friendship between Wally and Homer. Their views were aligned with the lack of moral codings for Candy in Table 4 under Aristotle and Kant. The codings under utilitarianism for Candy were rejected by the participants as immoral. However, Agatha, 33, female, also wondered if Homer was “emotionally mature enough” to deal with the more

⁷² In the film, Homer decides to leave.

experienced Candy, considering Homer has only travelled within Maine, but said of his attempts to deal with Candy, “but he tried to deal with it responsibly.” This is demonstrated in the next scene, Figure 4, which for Agatha, was the most meaningful scene for her when dealing with her own difficult questions: “Struck a chord with me because I think about these issues and identify with the concept of inaction being easy but frustrating.”

Figure 4: Homer and Candy at the dock

Homer and Candy continue their relationship for the duration of two harvests before Wally's return. After the first sexual encounter, Homer tries to clarify their relationship at the lobster pound:

HOMER: Well, Just tell me. Do you want me to stay, you want me to go?

CANDY: I don't know, I really don't know, I just – I think we should just wait and see.

HOMER: Ok

After receiving news about Wally's paralysis in the lower part of his body and his return in a month, Candy confesses to Homer at the dock that she is afraid to see Wally. Homer broaches the status of their relationship again but she just wants to do nothing. Her quick rejection of Homer's embrace suggests her guilt.

The close-up shot in Figure 4 shows both seated together but their faces are toward different directions suggesting their thoughts are on separate agendas about the predicament concerning Wally. Although Homer and Candy are seated close together, Candy's face shows signs of strain and Homer is withdrawn. For most of the time she does not look at Homer, but to the horizon. Her insistence of doing nothing to resolve the predicament suggests she thinks Homer is the problem that should go away by itself. Homer begins pensively:

HOMER: Do nothing, that's a great idea really. Maybe if I just wait and see long enough, I won't have to do anything or decide anything, you know, maybe, if I'm, I'm lucky enough, someone else will decide and choose and do things for me.

CANDY: (mumbles not looking at him) What are you talking about?

Homer doesn't seem to hear her as he continues. By the second sentence, his tone is aggrieved, rising slightly in the third sentence.

HOMER: But then again, maybe I won't be that lucky. And it's not my fault, it's not your fault, and that's just it. Someone's gonna get hurt and it's no one's fault.

The subtext in the last sentence implies somebody *will* get hurt if nothing is done to prevent it. Homer is essentially asking her to choose.

Homer's relationship with Candy started off with the right intentions on his part as he genuinely likes her. Now that Wally is coming back, where do Candy's affections lie? If Homer sticks around now and Candy chooses Wally later, Homer will be hurt, since Wally does not know of their relationship and will behave with Candy as if they never left off. If Homer stays until Wally returns, it could be worse for Wally, given his current condition, to realise his friend has betrayed him. Either way, the only option is for Homer to leave since Candy does not want to choose now. The quasi monologue here serves as a self-revelation for Homer taking responsibility. The sting of his words towards the end, as I listened to him, invoked my recollection of Dr Larch's voice-over in the opening credits of the film. He says: "young men leave home and travel far and wide in search of a promising future ... filled by dreams of ... triumphing over evil, finding a great love, or the hope of fortunes easily made..." The chance of finding a great love in Candy is forfeited here with Wally's future arrival. This self-revelation about making his own decisions foreshadows his offer to terminate Rose's pregnancy, and is the catalyst for Homer's journey back to St Cloud's.

Why is incest wrong?

Aristotle, Kant, and Mill do not state explicitly that incest is morally prohibited. However, moral tenets within their individual philosophies can help sketch out a frame in which to understand whether the act is impermissible. The incest between Rose and her father, Mr. Rose, can be explained by his appetite for pleasure which is not acted upon within his control of reason. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says: "For alien pleasures do pretty much what proper pains so, since activities are destroyed by their proper pains" (1175b). Mr. Rose's emotional breakdown in the rain when he dashes out partway during the abortion, illustrates the realisation of the iniquity of his act(s).⁷³ However, from his expression,

⁷³ Not known in the film how many times he commits incest.

when Homer confronts him with Rose's pregnancy, it appears Mr. Rose does not think incest is wrong, since it is just sexual relations to him. He tells Homer to mind his own business and says what Homer is doing with Candy is wrong as well, especially when Wally has taken him in. It is difficult to fault Mr. Rose here, based on his own comparison of the relationship with his daughter to Homer and Candy's situation. One could censure Mr. Rose for his vice, according to Aristotle, as acting under the influence of passion, considered a weakness in terms of "akrasia."⁷⁴ This makes incest blameworthy according to Aristotle.

Kant's defense of the sexual act, which makes it morally permissible, is centred on the reciprocal relations between spouses, since one loses one's humanity by giving of oneself to another as an object of sexual desire. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant states that sexual relations between a parent and child is unconditionally prohibited because the subordination is on the part of the child only so there is no reciprocity (160). Further, even if the incest is consensual, in Kant's view, the perfect duty to self makes the act wrong for *both* Rose and her father under the Doctrine of Virtue, because it is defiling oneself by lust.

For Mill, the parent-child relationship has specific boundaries of obligations. Since we do not know Rose's age in the film, it is not possible to deduce whether she fits the category of a child according to Mill's account of parental responsibilities. But Rose mentions a few times her father will not let her leave, which alludes to her being a minor. Assuming we categorise her as one who is not of age to be independent of Mr. Rose, then he has committed a "moral crime," because a parental obligation is to provide "a proper instruction and training" for the child according to Mill (*On Liberty* 172). By violating her, he is 'educating' her that someone could exercise dominion over her person at will, which is wrong when we take into account Mill's idea on harm. In *On Liberty*, Mill states: "the only

⁷⁴ See Erginel for an extended discussion on *akrasia* which is helpful to understanding Mr. Rose's actions and his reactions – whether he is dimly aware of or not fully cognizant of the act (573–593).

purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant” (94-95). On Mill’s view, the act is wrong as it causes Rose’s pregnancy which then exposes her to a surgical procedure. This could cause her harm as it is the first time Homer is performing an abortion and he is *not* a certified doctor.

It is inferred that Rose’s incestuous relationship with her father is non-consensual when she is at first unwilling to reveal the father of her child to Candy. The film takes the position that incest is wrong when it portrays Candy stumbling through the orchard in search of Homer and tells him Mr. Rose is the father of Rose’s baby. Her expression and urgent words to Homer about keeping Rose away “from that bastard” drive this point home for the audience that the incestuous relationship is wrong. How the film portrays Candy’s reaction to the news suggests this. Further, without at first knowing the paternity of Rose’s baby, Candy initially tells Homer that both of them could bring Rose to St Cloud’s and let Rose decide what to do. Homer also suggested it to Rose earlier. Hence, the film’s moral position here is not whether abortion is right or wrong, but that it thinks incest is wrong.

Interpretations of incest

The revelation of the incestuous relation between Rose and her father was one of the top three meaningful scenes for the participants. The idea of a parent-child incestuous relationship was repugnant for some participants from a biological standpoint as it also threatens the power relationships within the family dynamics. The participants’ interpretations of incest though, are interesting as none stated it is wrong on moral grounds. Athlyn, 23, interpreted the father and daughter relationship as positive:

This film, I think portrayed the really strong connection between the father and the daughter, and how the daughter didn't hate the father, and how the father really cared about the daughter at the end... Like, there was still definitely some affection that she had for him.

Other participants however, found Rose's revelation about the pregnancy unsettling and it modified their views on abortion or reinforced them because of it. Noland, who declares himself pro-life on religious grounds, describes abortion as a "necessary evil" here, as "Rose was not given a choice when raped so should have choice to abort." Cato explains that Homer's declaration he is happy to be alive should not apply in Rose case, as "in-bred pregnancy has [a] higher chance of being disabled – kid may not be happy to be alive".

It's against the law

Homer's reaction to the incest is measured compared to Candy's and his parting words to Mr. Rose when he confronts him shows he is more disagreeable to the idea that Rose is pregnant than to the incestuous relationship. It is also Rose's condition that tips Homer's pro-life stance over to terminating her pregnancy. Because Homer has seen an adolescent present with acute peritonitis with the foetus left in her uterus, as a result of a botched abortion elsewhere with a crochet hook, he offers to terminate Rose pregnancy. Rose was running away from the cider house, presumably to terminate the pregnancy elsewhere. During the procedure, we see Homer's confidence in handling the surgical instruments and giving instructions to Mr. Rose on administering the ether.

In performing the abortion, Homer disavows his tenets of not terminating unwanted children, holding mothers responsible for their own pregnancies, and recanting his statements that he is not a doctor. Earlier in the film, his refusal to perform abortions is played out in the following exchange.

LARCH: First pregnancy?

HOMER: Yes, for both.

LARCH: (sarcastically) I presume you'd prefer handling the delivery.

HOMER: (tiredly) all I said was, I don't want to perform abortions. I have no argument with you performing them.

LARCH: You know how to help these women--how you cannot feel obligated to help them when they can't get help anywhere else?

HOMER: One: it's illegal. Two: I didn't ask how to do it--you just showed me.

LARCH: What else could I have shown you, Homer? The only thing I can teach you is what I know! In any life, you have to be of use.

Homer repeats "of use - of use" as he stalks off to deliver the baby. This refrain is often heard by Homer while under the tutelage of Dr Larch whose purpose is to give him a future where he could be of use to society. The longstanding disagreement with Dr Larch arises from Homer's strict adherence to the law and his determination to protect foetal life. Dr Larch does give Homer latitude in exercising his own judgement however, on the issue of abortion.

In a voice-over during the following scene Dr Larch says: "I chose my own path – no one would ever choose for Homer Wells." This scene occurs just after Dr Larch gives an abortion, the results of which are in the pail. The timeline is about the time when Homer receives medical training from Dr Larch to deliver the unwanted babies of women who then leave them at St Cloud's. As the sequence of the scene unfolds, the camera tracks Homer's steps to the incinerator. Figure 5.1 shows the incinerator shot from diametrically opposite to St Cloud's which is cast in muted light in the background with Homer between it and the incinerator in the back. The long shot accentuates the insignificance of life as represented by Homer's figure in the middle of the frame. The bare tree trunks clothed in desaturated brown

tones of the colour cinematography evoke images of barren life forms. They complement Dr Larch's reference to mothers dying of secrecy as they seek unprofessional methods to abort because abortion is illegal during that time. The scene also accentuates the immateriality of the dead fetuses, which are disposed like garbage into the slender column of the incinerator.

Figure 5.1: Homer walking to the incinerator

The trees and incinerator both represent the extinguishing of life. The cinematography thus heightens the sombre moods of death and mourning with the camera tracking Homer tramping through the woods, reminiscent of a funeral procession on its way to cremating the dead. This is at odds with the swinging pail that Homer carries. The swinging pail suggesting a carefree nonchalance in the previous shot which is undercut with Homer's grasp of the effects of abortion as he looks at the foetus's remains in the pail in Figure 5.2.

The scene taken as a whole is the film's embodied vision, to shift its attention from the abortion that occurs prior to this scene and moves our perspective of the abortion to

Homer's POV as he looks into the pail in Figures 5.2 and 5.3. Sobchack explains in *Address of the Eye*: "in a film, as in our immediate and direct experience, perception functions as a modality of expression, and expression as a modality of perception," which means these two modalities enable "having sense and making sense of the signification" of this scene (13). In other words, what we could not experience during the abortion is made possible now that our attention is directed to perceiving the foetus's death, as we imagine the disintegrated mess in the pail through Homer's expression of the aborted foetus in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Opening the lid

The shot in Figure 5.3 strips his naïveté and secures his resolute stance about terminating life. As a result of what Homer sees in the pail, he refuses Buster's offer to carry it in a later scene, to prevent him from imagining he might easily have been the last vestiges lying in the pail if his mother had an abortion, as Homer must be thinking the same of himself here. The long shot of Figure 5.1 supplements Figure 5.3, suggesting Homer's alienation as

the lone dissenting voice to the mothers who want abortion, to Dr Larch who performs them, and the nurses who assist him.

Figure 5.3: Discovering the foetus

In Figures 5.1 – 5.3, the film shifts its subjectivity and the audience’s back to a neutral standpoint on abortion. As Sobchack asserts, it is the “mutuality of embodied existence and the dynamic movement of its perceptual and expressive relations with and in the world that provide the common denominator of cinematic communication” (13). This scene serves to contextualise for the audience Homer’s disagreement with Dr Larch. The film shows this back and forth movement of shifting its expression and perception such that our direct experience of abortion shifts as well.

Irresponsible people should not have children

Chronologically, the film maintains its neutrality by providing the oppositional points-of-view to the audience as shown in the next two conversations between Dr Larch and

Homer. While digging a grave for the girl who had the botched abortion, Dr Larch tries to persuade Homer that abortion is a responsible solution.

LARCH: If you expect people to be responsible for their children, you have to give them the right to decide whether or not to have children. Wouldn't you agree?

HOMER: How about expecting people to be responsible enough to control themselves to begin with?

Scenes of delivery in the film are often accompanied by screams and the mother's refusal to see the baby whereas abortions are carried out in a calm, sympathetic manner by Dr Larch. These offer the audience an outlet to think if abortion is the solution as well for unwanted children.

I'm happy to be alive

Coupled with the shots in Figures 5.2 and 5.3, the below exchange also strengthens Homer's argument of the foetus's potentiality for personhood. The dialogue occurs in the truck Buster is driving on their way back to St Cloud's after burying the girl.

LARCH: It's just a marvel to me that you still have such high expectations of people.

HOMER: I'm happy I amuse you.

LARCH: Look at it this way - what choice does Buster have? What are his options? Nobody will ever adopt him.

(Buster considers this)

HOMER: Look at it this way - Buster and I are sitting right here beside

you. We could have ended up in the incinerator!

(Buster grins)

LARCH: Happy to be alive, under any circumstances---is that your point?

(Buster is distracted and almost crashes the truck)

HOMER: Happy to be alive...yah I guess so.

Assuming the foetus is a person (from Homer's point-of-view), Dr Larch's point is valid according to utilitarianism. An abortion is morally acceptable if it produces more utility – in this case, the mother, who has a right to control her body, will not be saddled with the emotional and financial burdens of the child's needs. In the dialogue, Homer is claiming the same right to control his body as a foetus and his rational choice would be to live, which is a view closer to Kant's moral principles.

By pitching the two perspectives on pregnancy in the previous dialogues, the film maintains its neutrality. It achieves this also by not showing the gory details of the botched abortion and the foetal remains, enabling the audience to imagine the horror of what Homer experiences. These aspects are posited through Homer's POV so the audience can appreciate the difficult choice he makes when he actually performs Rose's abortion. The burning of the cider house ruins after this emphasizes his willingness to review his own interpretation of right and wrong conduct. His assurance to Mr. Rose that he is the legitimate means to the procedure demonstrates the recanting of his statements to Dr Larch and Buster earlier that he is not a doctor.

Perspectives on Abortion

Agatha said, abortion is a “complex issue – I see both sides. Film did a good job of presenting the nuances.” The two sides on abortion presented in the film were not well

received by a participant and he was not sure what the “message” in the film is about.

Frederick, 25, Freethinker, male said:

Whether abortion is good, whether abortion is bad...Okay, I would say the message is to tell me that abortion is not something that we actually desire but under certain circumstances, abortion is still necessary. I think that's the message. I agree with what the movie is trying to show. Abortion is appropriate only under certain circumstances.

Frederick added that Dr Larch has a “valid point” and it is the “moral right of parents to decide [as the] child does not have the conscience to decide whether to live or not.”

The majority of participants agreed with Dr Larch's statement that people should be given the right to choose. However, Buena, 20, Buddhist, female, cautions that one “not abuse [the] right to choose.”

Noland says of Dr Larch: “he respects rights of patients” but cautions he “should exercise discretion when acceding to patients' requests”. Noland, however, disagrees about the choice to choose: “I believe that the choice to have children is made when a couple decides to take part in unprotected intercourse.” Noland is agreeable to abortion only in cases of rape, as illustrated earlier in reference to Rose's pregnancy, because the ‘victim’ has no choice in the violation.

The Protégé

The film also sets up a prelude for the audience early in the film that Homer is competent to step into Dr Larch's place in the scene where they name the anonymous babies together (Figure 6). In the scene, both are framed as colleagues in consult together when Dr Larch defers to Homer's choice of a name. This illustrates the equal status Dr Larch has always accorded him but which Homer declines to accept. Hence, Homer leaving the cider house because of Candy, performing the abortion, and the renunciation of his own rules, are

inexorably tied to his homecoming after Dr Larch's death.

Figure 6: Naming names

Figure 7 is a shot of Homer in the truck leaving the cider house with the pickers as he watches Wally arriving home to Candy. He tells the pickers he has to move on.

Figure 7: Leaving Cider House

Homer's Homecoming

The establishing shot of Homer's train journey (Figure 8.1) starts off with the same non-diegetic score as the opening credits of the film. As the voice-over begins, the scene cuts to Dr Larch's burial (Figure 8.2), then to the girls' division in St Cloud's, and back to Homer (Figure 8.3). These contiguous positioning of the scenes in sequence establishes for the audience an audio-visual symmetry which sets the emotional ambiance for Homer's homecoming.

EDNA (off-screen): Oh, Lord, support us all the day long

Figure 8.1: Homer in train

EDNA (off-screen): (cont'd) until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes

Figure 8.2: Dr Larch burial

The camera cuts to the girls' division in St Cloud's. Camera closes on Homer, sleeping to the sound of the moving train (Figure 8.3).

EDNA (off-screen): and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest,

Figure 8.3: Homer asleep

EDNA (voice-over): and peace at the last.

The last sentence and the camera focus on Homer's face (Figure 8.3) is the signification of a returning orphan/child to the protective fold of the surrogate mothers (nurses Angela and Edna). By going on a journey, as Dr Larch predicted young men do, Homer finds love as Dr Larch suspected in the letter he sends Homer. In finding that love and the ensuing heartbreak, Homer makes a decision to return; and as a result, he finds peace and the love that has always been around in St Cloud's. He left a place of love to seek it only to find there is none.

The scene in Figure 8.3 dissolves to Homer's arrival at the station with the doctor's bag (Figure 8.4) which marks the smooth transitioning of his identity as an orphan/child to shouldering responsibilities. Either way, Homer's return fulfils the foretelling in Dr Larch's rhetorical question at the beginning of the film: "In failing to withhold love, in making the orphanage his home, had I created a true and everlasting orphan?"

Figure 8.4: Homer arrives at train station

Homer may have been an orphan for lack of his biological parents in the beginning of the film but Dr Larch gave him parental love. In returning to St Cloud's, he is now a true orphan as the only parent he has ever known has died.

The train then begins to move away (Figure 8.5) with the background of St Cloud's in the hills in the natural light. As it leaves, it evokes our memory of the same image in the beginning of the film (Figure 8.6) where the train arriving on the same track deposits a couple at the station who was going to adopt Homer. The train movement and our optical movement in Figure 8.5 align to focus our frame of reference to reflect on the time when the couple returns Homer to St Cloud's (Figure 8.6). The different composition of the two images and the metaphorical meaning of the rails suggest losing the opportunity to become part of a family then but now, gaining one in the process (Figure 8.7).

Figure 8.5: Train moves away in the end

Figure 8.6: Train arrival in the beginning

From the train station, Homer trudges in the snow walking towards the imposing building of St Cloud's. Once Buster spies him, he rushes over with a wild welcome (Figure 8.7) and the nurses and other children join in (Figure 8.8).

Figure 8.7: Buster's welcome

Figure 8.8: Homer's home

Homer's homecoming was one of the top meaningful scenes for the participants. Cato also found it "heart-warming" that Homer is back with his family. Although for Presley, 22,

Presbyterian, male, who declared that the film was his least preferred said: “I don’t think I was that big a fan of *Cider House Rules*.” Yet, he found the scene meaningful:

I liked this bittersweet scene. Like, everyone in the orphanage, they all still saw each other as their own family. So, when Homer came back and greeted all of them, it was nice to see even though none of them got adopted and managed to escape the home, being an orphan throughout life at this stage, it was still nice they could still see like, the silver lining.

As some participants noted, the ending was poignant as it shows Dr Larch’s foresight in developing Homer to his potential to be of use to society. Participant Athlyn approved that Homer is in a “surrogate father role” on his return to St Cloud’s.

In response to Dr Larch remarks in the beginning: “Here at St. Cloud's, I try to consider, with each rule I make or break, that my first priority is an orphan's future,” some participants were conflicted regarding Dr Larch’s actions.

Doctoring through fraudulent means

Nurse Angela reveals to Homer that Dr Larch substituted Fuzzy’s heart x-ray for Homer’s to prevent him from going to war and risk getting killed. Also, Dr Larch forged Homer’s medical certificates. He gave Homer his own qualifications by changing the name so he could hand them to the board of St Cloud’s to hire Homer for the job. These were two things Dr Larch carried out which did not sit well with the participants as some perceived Homer did not have a choice although the faking of credentials was one of the top meaningful scenes for some participants.

Agatha, aged 33, Agnostic, female: “I am a little disturbed at how cavalierly Dr Larch broke the rules to ensure that the right person got the job, rather than trusting to the system.” Augusta, aged 22, Agnostic, female, said “there’s a forced responsibility for him to go back” as the documents are all forged in his name.

Presley thought it was “selfish” of Dr Larch to fake the x-ray. He reiterated:

I still think it’s selfish. You never know if he’ll be killed in the war. Okay, that’s one factor, and secondly, he also blocked him from a lot of opportunities by remaining in the orphanage. Let’s say, okay he can get conscripted, but who knows, maybe he’ll really shine. He’ll really enjoy life as a soldier or something. Like, that’s not your decision to make.

Engagement with Cider House Rules

Five participants listed this film as their most preferred because the film offered different moral issues and avenues for the participants to ruminate. Buena said:

Kind of a tie here between the *Cider House Rules* and *Revolutionary Road*. I think more of *Cider House Rules*...they portrayed more than one issue...they talked about abortion...family...relationships like the three-way between them.

Frederick: “I find more elaboration on the specific parts. Like for abortion alone, they showed different situations and not just tell you, oh like that.”

There were 11 positive experiences as a result of the participants’ interactions with the film.

Agatha: “Thoughtful and nuanced look at morality and the choices we make every day.”

Cato: “Sets me thinking on how different scenarios affect a person’s moral values.”

Noland: “Film explores and explains. Makes audience empathise with characters.”

There was only one negative experience of the film, which Presley said was also his least preferred. Citing his reasons, he said: “A little too draggy. Nice how they managed to touch on so many social issues and brought them up organically. Seems a little unrealistic with all the positivity.”

Associations with Utilitarian view to abortions

The film modified three perspectives.

Augusta: “Modifies my perspectives on whether an act can be considered plain wrong.”

Noland: “Film shows abortion may be a better choice. Life should be valued but Rose case showed there are exceptions.”

The abortion for non-consensual and incestual reasons shifted some perspectives to pro-abortion ones. Overall, the participants associated with the utilitarian view to abortion mainly through the scenes where they found meanings through the dialogue and cinematography analysed in the previous sections. However, the participants’ objections to lies and forgery were strong even if they agreed that Homer’s return to the orphanage meant that the ‘family’ of orphans were reunited with Homer replacing Dr Larch as the head of the family. Hence, this interpretation is aligned with the Kantian perfect duty to others about truthfulness which also applies to their aversion to Candy’s action. The participants’ disassociation with infidelity in Homer’s and Candy’s relationship point to a Kantian orientation but the reasons were also aligned with the Aristotelian virtue of friendship which the participants deemed to be important when Homer was considered to be disloyal to Wally.

CHAPTER FIVE: *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Revolutionary Road*, *Breaking Dawn*

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

Out of the five films, *Bridges of Madison County* modified the perspectives of nearly half of the participants on issues of love, extramarital affairs, responsibilities, and sacrifice. One participant did not indicate her choice of meaningful scene in the film as she thought it was a formulaic love story. 14 participants chose the kitchen, the dinner, and the truck scenes as particularly meaningful to them with some selecting a combination of scenes. The majority of responses indicated that dialogue was the main factor which provided meaningful interactions with the film, and the truck scene as the appropriate solution to the predicament in the film. Hence, for this film, the analysis will concentrate on the dialogue which the participants specified as the most provoking for them.

Love that comes but once in a lifetime ... or does it really?

In the following scene in Francesca's kitchen, we see her uncertainty and vulnerability when she asks Robert what their relationship means to him. The excerpt of the conversation illustrates their intense feelings. We can sense some tension between them, this being their last day together.

FRANCESCA: Well, I just want to know the procedures. I don't want to upset your routine. You want some jam?

ROBERT: What are you talking about, routine. There's no routine. Is that what you think this is?

FRANCESCA: Well, what is this?

ROBERT: (upset) Why is it up to me? You're the one who's married. You have no intention of leaving your husband.

After Francesca throws her breakfast plate and his into the sink, she questions Robert (Figure 9.1).

Figure 9.1: Questioning Robert

ROBERT: What do you want me to say?

FRANCESCA: (nonchalant) I ... I don't want you to say anything. I don't need you to say anything.

ROBERT: I'm not going to be made to feel like I've done something wrong.

ROBERT: (cont'd) I don't want to need you!

FRANCESCA: Why?

ROBERT: Because I can't have you.
(trying to hold his emotions in check)

ROBERT: If I've done anything to make you think that what's happened between us is nothing new for me - is just some routine -- then I do apologise.

Having cleared the air and knowing Robert's feelings for her, they embrace (Figure 9.2) but are interrupted by a neighbour so Robert goes upstairs to the bedroom and waits out. When the neighbour finally leaves, Francesca and Robert spend the afternoon together until dinner time.

Figure 9.2: Embrace

Meanings of love

In reference to Francesca in this scene, Frey said: “Her outburst is understandable and I feel it highlights how women are often left abandoned by men who merely wanted to have some fun.”

The participants classified the love between Robert and Francesca as passionate, “selfless and surrendering” (Batista), and the kind that “sweeps you off your feet and makes

you feel alive” (Agatha). Differentiating between the types of love, Cato said the love between Francesca and Richard, her husband, was one of “duty”. Tami, 22, Taoist, female, said the love is due to a “sense of responsibility” for Richard. Presley wrote in the questionnaire: “Francesca clearly loved both of them but compartmentalized them under two separate categories of her life which could only ironically exist simultaneously.” Presley was referring to the love she has for Robert after the affair and which continues throughout her marriage with Richard.

Participants were mostly sceptical about Robert’s statement that love “comes but once in a lifetime.” They pointed out that the short duration did not allow for love to develop and it could just be an intense infatuation.

Athlyn said: “actually, the four days thing was a bit hard to believe. I was very sceptical that they could be so much in love just for the four days.”

Frey explained that four days was too early to judge a relationship because: “all relationships feel like a sure thing from the start.”

Referring to what Francesca should do after the four-day affair, Cato said:

I would still stay on lah. Because from my point of view if I were in her shoes, okay, as an outsider, a third party watching this, I would say that it’s an infatuation ... Four days to get to know the person. It can be a very passionate, very heated kind of feeling, but you don’t really know that person. He’s a traveller, you’re a housewife. If you tag along, you might not think of the long-term... it might just be a yolo-thinking. You want to do this now. And like I said, this kind of infatuation thing tends to cloud our judgement. So, I feel if I were in her shoes, I would stay lah.

All the participants regarded the affair as morally wrong which has Kantian overtones. However, as the following scenes demonstrate, Francesca’s reasons for not leaving with Robert illustrates that her moral character is sound and her motivation stems from

responsibilities to her children and spouse, Richard.

Life of Details

In the diaries, Francesca tells her children in a voice-over that it is precisely because of Robert that she could continue in the marriage and stay with the family. The voice-over tells the story from Francesca's point-of-view so the audience feel and see her struggle, which culminates towards the end of the film, where a decision needs to be made to resolve the predicament. In the scene below she tells Robert that when the time comes, he has to make the decision for her because she will not be able to do so.

Figure 10.1: Last dinner

The long shot (Figure 10.1) is of Francesca's and Robert's last night together in her house. The camera cuts from Robert in the kitchen lighting candles, then back to Francesca upstairs packing her bags. Thus, the audience knows from the inference that Francesca is leaving with Robert. Francesca slowly walks down the stairs and joins Robert at the table. However, both

are silent for a while. Below is an excerpt of the conversation between Francesca and Robert.

ROBERT: You're not coming with me, are you?

FRANCESCA: (tries to find the right words) No matter how many times I turn it over and over in my mind -- it doesn't seem like the right thing.

ROBERT: For who?

FRANCESCA: For anyone. They'll never be able to live through the talk. And Richard ... it will break him in half...

ROBERT: (quietly) Well, he could move on. People move.

FRANCESCA: His family's has had this farm for over a hundred years ... Richard doesn't know how to live anywhere else. And my kids...

FRANCESCA: (cont'd)

Carolyn's 16. She's just about to find out about all this for herself -- she's going to fall in love, she's going to try and build a life with someone. If I leave what does that say to her?

FRANCESCA: (cont'd)

No matter how much distance we put between ourselves and this house, I carry it with me ... I would start to blame loving you for how much it hurts. And even these ...even these four beautiful days would be just like some sordid mistake.

ROBERT: We are hardly two separate people now. Some people search all their lives and never find it. Others don't even think it exists.

FRANCESCA: We are all the choices we have made Robert. You don't understand. Don't you see? When a woman makes a choice to marry and have children, in one way her love begins, in another way, it stops. You build a life of details and you just stop and stay steady so that your children can move... You never think love like this can happen to you...

Figure 10.2: If we leave we lose it

Figure 10.3: You have to help me

Figures 10.2 – 10.5 shows her reasoning with Robert on why she cannot leave. Robert tells her that she does not need to decide immediately as he will stay in town for a few days. But Francesca tells him when the time arrives for her to choose, he has to make the decision, as she cannot do so.

Figure 10.4: Don't throw us away

ROBERT: Maybe you will feel differently. We don't have to decide right now.

FRANCESCA: If that happens you have to decide, because I can't.

Figure 10.5: I can't decide

ROBERT: I'll only say this once. I've never said it before. But this kind of certainty comes but just once in a lifetime.

Figure 10.6: Robert leaves

Robert drives off. Francesca dashes out and watches him leave (Figure 10.7).

Figure 10.7: Sorrow

Character Assessment

The scene which depicts the last night together also affords the participants an insight of the struggle Francesca has about leaving with Robert and the participants regarded her words here as redeeming factors in assessing her character.

Augusta, 22, Agnostic, English undergraduate wrote: “scene where she tells Robert she cannot leave – her own dreams never get fulfilled, emotional to see her torn.”

Athlyn, 23, Atheist, English undergraduate, said:

Definitely she is cheating, but again the way she portrayed it, you definitely sympathise with her and you don't want to, she doesn't seem like a bad character that you want to vilify ... I would think that would be the right choice because she said that what would her daughter think if she left the marriage ... I would say she's very caring, responsible, she knows her duty well, and she's able to put her family's needs above her own. So, she's very considerate and self-sacrificing.

Burnette, 22, Buddhist, female, reflected:

That she was so certain about Robert. She really wanted to run away. And like, she was looking out for such an amazing life out there and Robert has promised her so much. But her decision to stay just for a mundane life just for her kids, I think that alone was very, very brave. I mean there's nothing back at home for you to be longing about, at least in her heart that I can see. But because she feels her children need her to play the mother's role that she had to stay, and what her husband needs from her, that's why she stayed. She's so considerate about what her children need, her husband needs... I think she's so daring to make such a decision. I think it's very easy to just run away like that, but to stay take a different kind of courage I feel.

Cato, 24, Catholic, Mechanical Engineering undergraduate wrote: “Taking care of family is applaudable. If situation without kids, she would have chosen to leave.”

As illustrated by the participants' interpretations of Francesca's actions, they largely concur with the moral codings in the film as illustrated in Table 5. Although the film has only 25 moral codings in total, Francesca's character, struggles, and moral actions affected the participants in their judgement of her affair with Robert. Even though they considered it wrong, her considerations for her children and family had a positive effect on how they perceived her. The coding results in Table 5 show she has a balance of virtues and moral principles which indicates a good moral character.

Character Codes

Table 5: Character Codes in *Bridges of Madison County*

Moral Codes	Francesca	Robert	Others	Total
Aristotle Virtues	5	7	0	12
Kant Principles	5	5	3	13
Mill Utilitarianism	0	0	0	0
Total Codings				25

Francesca: The Kantian codings were attributed to demonstrating kindness towards the Redfield woman, parental obligations to the children, and respect for Richard including the discharge of her spousal duties to him when he is ill. Aristotelian codings were for temperance, wit and truth. In her decision to remain in the marriage, she displays temperance. She tells the truth of her affair to her children in the diaries she leaves behind for them to read and her wit is displayed in conversations with Robert. While she has one coding each for

parental and spousal obligations, the participants pointed out three instances of spousal duties and six instances where she performed parental obligations. These relate to her actions in taking care of the children and husband prior to and just after the affair.

Robert: There were seven codings from Aristotelian virtues which refer to wit and truth. These were coded from the conversations with Francesca and also telling the truth about his feelings for her and the relationship. This is demonstrated when Francesca receives the necklace she gave him during their four days together and which he keeps until he dies. The Kantian codings were for imperfect duties to self for the cultivation of his skills as he had published his photographs of the Roseman Bridge, which he took during his time with her. Francesca had encouraged him to publish his work then. As well, his behaviour towards Francesca is one of benevolence as he walks away in the rain respecting her decision not to leave with him.

Others: There were two codings for Richard (Francesca's husband) in his parental and spousal duties and one for Michael (Francesca's son) in fulfilling his spousal obligation towards his neglected wife, Betty, towards the end of the film.

To leave or stay in the truck

Francesca's predicament is resolved by her own decision to remain in the truck. This is the scene that the most participants felt conflicted about. On the one hand, some thought she should leave but the majority thought this was the right action on her part. Figures 11.1-11.5 show the camera cutting from one shot to another, from Robert to Francesca. This heightens the tension for the audience and adds to the suspense on whom she would choose.

Figure 11.1: Peering out the window

Figure 11.2: Robert waits by his truck

Robert walks closer towards her. He stops in the middle of the road. Both look at each other.

Figure 11.3: Francesca staring at Robert

Figure 11.4: Robert waits in the rain

Then Francesca smiles and Robert smiles but as he abruptly moves back to his truck, she thinks he's leaving her but it is Richard who comes into the truck. They start driving. Voice-over of Francesca starts: "For a moment I didn't know where I was." At the traffic light,

Richard's truck is behind Robert's. Francesca's voice continues as Robert leans across the glove box the same way he leans across Francesca eight days ago when they first meet and she was sitting beside him. Francesca sees him drape her necklace over the rear view mirror as a sign. The green light comes on and Richard honks at Robert's truck to move. The camera focuses on Francesca's hand squeezing the handle tightly and turning it a few times at the traffic lights (Figure 11.6). The audience can feel her moral struggle.

Figure 11.5: Staring ahead

Figure 11.6: Clutching the handle

However, Robert drives off and the opportunity is lost for Francesca. He heeds her words by deciding for her, as she had asked him to do during the dinner.

Engagement with the moral struggle

Augusta, 22, Agnostic, female, described:

It was painful to watch because like, she ... in a lot of pain to decide. Not impulse ... It was raining very heavily. So, it was very chaotic in the sense like, cos when it rains, everything is very noisy, and they were stuck in that ... Yeah, and it was very suffocating. During that scene I think it was more about making a choice.

She's like *suffering uhhh* ... She really wanted to leave. I feel that's the climax of the scene. And I feel at that point in time, the children are not her priority because they are not there, so it's just her, the guy and her husband. So, she could really have just dropped everything and left, but she stayed. I don't think it was a cowardly decision ... she's feeling so much but outside the scene is so shut in on her and it's like her internal conflict is so intense. I felt more for her after I think when she, when the husband was driving and she was crying.

Presley said the film was his most preferred: "Aside from the fact that it was great acting, I thought the story presented itself really well." On his response to the truck scene, he said:

"It made me empathise with the characters. At one point, I was actually rooting for her... open the door! Just run to the other car, run to the other car... (laughs excitedly)... what makes you happy, go for it!"

Presley elaborated further at the interview about his response to the scene.

Aiyoh,⁷⁵ the truck one ah? At that point of time, I was totally... from the perspective of Francesca already... and I'm like, and I'm not the most selfless person, so I'm like, go for it, go for your happiness. But like, after the movie, I did think of it and wonder, would I really cheer her on in the end because if she goes for her happiness, she is abandoning her entire family, so...(big sigh)

Batista said he preferred the film the most. He admitted that at the end of the movie he felt “vulnerable of relationships – feels as though it is inevitable to fall for someone even though you may be in a committed relationship.” On why the film is his most preferred, Batista explained:

The *Bridges of Madison County*, you really can feel and see the emotions going through them. You can see at the point when she keeps deliberating within herself, should she go out with what's-the-guy's-name-the-Clint-Eastwood ... yeah, should she go out with Robert? Should she call Robert? She's constantly deciding. It feels like a very real thing that she's deciding, yeah. The story's just focused on the two of them, not focused on anything else. Very focused, not like so many characters.

The film also modified seven participants' perspectives on extra marital affairs and Francesca is viewed through a sympathetic lens by both males and females.

Athlyn: “It made me modify my perspective on extra marital affairs as being not inherently wrong.”

Buena: “The film did change the way I view adultery slightly.”

Presley: “Definitely opens up my eyes to the perspective of the cheater.”

Although Tami had a negative film experience because she disapproved of the affair as Francesca is already married, arguing that: “[the] relationship with Robert was a mistake

⁷⁵ Singlish term. In the context of this sentence, it's an exclamation of pain or commiseration for the situation.

from the start despite her marriage wasn't ideal. Marriage involves husband and children.” However, she chose it as the most preferred film. Tami said the film “touched” her so she preferred it the most and it also modified her perspective:

“I always thought that having an affair was unforgiveable, after watching the film an affair is not just something dirty and unforgivable, but it can be a beautiful regret in life.”

Altogether, there were three positive film experiences but it was not their most preferred film.

Agnes: “Very emotional because of Meryl Streep. I like the ending a lot – it’s very bittersweet yet necessary.”

Cato: “Emotional film which portrays love from a family perspective and when third party is involved.”

On Francesca’s and Robert’s affair and the one between the Redfield woman and Mr Delaney (minor characters), all the participants felt that both men and women have an equal part in having extramarital relationships with each other. Even though infidelity was considered morally wrong, the dialogue driven narrative, identification with Francesca’s struggle, the participants’ beliefs in the importance of parental responsibilities, generated sympathy for Francesca such that the film provided gratification for participants in certain scenes. But for some participants, the strong disassociation with infidelity caused disengagement with the film due to the beliefs in marital and parental commitment as illustrated in the following section.

Disengagement with *Bridges of Madison County*

Frederick was one of the participants who found the truck scene emotional which appealed to him compared to the rest of the film. But he said overall he had a negative film

experience as he felt the “story could be summarized and more concise.” It was also his least preferred him: “the plot is quite straightforward but I just find it too slow, too draggy.” In the interview, when questioned further on his disengagement with the film, it was found he strongly disassociated with Francesca’s affair, although he accepted that true love could happen with another person.

Frederick: In this particular case, she found her true love or something like that. They happen to love each other a lot, but the fact is that she’s already married. Then, she may think she finally found her true love, but there’s still a commitment she has to go through lah ... I guess the children will probably play an important part, but be it whether she has children or not, once you are in, you should stay committed all the way lah ... But the fact is that, at least for this film, I think the husband didn’t do anything.

I: Yeah, the husband seems fine.

Frederick: Yeah, the husband didn’t do anything bad to her or anything that would sabotage their marriage. So, I don’t see any reason for her to betray him. (cont’d) Of course, I think it’s unacceptable ...it’s still a duty you have to fulfil lah. Those are your kids, your husband. There’s no reason for you to leave them. It’s not like, no abuse or anything what. Everything is normal. Nothing wrong.

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

This film has the lowest number of moral codes overall. The issues identified were: abortion (pro-life/pro-choice), suicide, infidelity, faithfulness in marriage, opportunity cost of having children, marital and familial obligations, not having proper communications, mental health, domestic abuse, pursuing dreams, conformity. 14 participants found scenes meaningful, which were centred mainly on the dialogue in quarrel scenes that they found the most engrossing, scenes with John, and the breakfast scene leading to the post abortion.

There was a split in opinions regarding April and Frank on their handling of their marital problems and the self-induced abortion. While the film modified two perspectives, it reinforced one participant's perspective of the importance of mental health in stressful periods. It also supported the notion of divorce for another participant. The analysis in the film is focused on the dialogue with supporting statements from the participants who described what they feel as they experienced the scenes.

Character Codes

Table 6: Character Codes in *Revolutionary Road*

Moral Codes	April	Frank	Others	Total
Aristotle Virtues	1	3	2	6
Kant Principles	2	6	0	8
Mill Utilitarianism	4	0	0	4
Total Codings				18

April: April has four utilitarianism codings, two pertaining to actions that she takes in moving to Paris and one to get the device for abortion, and for the abortion itself. She has one

coding under Kantian benevolence in her offer to work while Frank takes the time to figure out what he wants to do in Paris. Her sympathy for John's 37 electrotherapies was coded under Kantian sympathy. As well, from the narrative, she is shown to be outspoken about the truth, so the action is coded under Aristotelian virtues. The participants said she fulfilled her parental obligations although there was no evidence in the screenplay or the film.

Frank: Aristotelian virtues coded were for his wit in instances where he interacts with April in the beginning, and his interactions with his colleagues. Under consideration was whether he had deliberately withheld speaking about his infidelity on the night that April gives him a birthday cake. However, from his expression, one can surmise that he did not want to hurt April with his infidelity. Besides, he reveals the truth to her later. Kantian codings were for the cultivation of skill, which got him the promotion at Knox, one parental and two spousal obligations but the participants only picked out one of each. The spousal obligation was his intent to make April happy and his offer to get her medical assistance.

Others: Aristotelian virtue of truthfulness was coded for John as he appears to be the only character who speaks frankly.

Participants generally enjoyed scenes when John appears in the film. He is first introduced to the Wheelers by his mother. In the scene in Figure 12, his insightful comments about life and his probing questions of the Wheelers in later scenes articulate the actual state of marriage and the real reasons why Frank later decides not to leave for Paris. This scene (Figure 12) articulates what the Wheelers are experiencing in their marriage and everyday life, although Frank tries to adapt and makes the most of the situation while April, on the other hand, is unable to do so.

Burnette, 22, Buddhist, female, said: "When April and Frank walking with John – then they all realized other people who feel this emptiness and hopelessness as well.

Performance of John that gave meaning to the scene.”

The Plan

Figure 12: A walk in the woods

April: It's awful not to be able to do what it is that you want to do ...

JOHN: So what do a couple like you have to run away from?

FRANK: We're not running.

JOHN: So what's in Paris?

APRIL: Different way of life.

FRANK: Maybe we are running. We're running from the hopeless emptiness of our whole life here, right? (looking towards April)

JOHN: The hopeless emptiness. Now you said it. Funny, people are on to the emptiness – but it takes real guts to see the hopelessness...

John is a character who always hits on the truth as the participants said. He was a brilliant mathematician until he received 37 electro therapies which wiped his memory of mathematics out. In the scene (Figure 12), Frank articulates the hopelessness which is not shown in the beginning of the film. However, it is inferred that the hopelessness he feels could be attributed to his less than cordial relations with this wife. Scenes of him travelling by train daily to work in his office at Knox and lunches with his colleagues show him to be a contented person. It is only when he arrives home, when he pauses before he goes into the house that the audience surmises his married life is not a happy one. It is April who devises the plan of moving to Paris because she could not tolerate living with the emptiness of a domesticated life. However, she persuades Frank it is for him that the move is about so he can have time to do whatever he wants.

In the beginning segments of the film, we see her acting in a play which drew scathing comments about her lack of skill. Frustrated, she argues with Frank in the middle of the road. Frank wants to sort out the argument but April shuts him out. As the film progresses, we see a pattern occurs with all their fights – April does not want to talk and Frank tries to reason with her. The fight scenes were those the participants in the study enjoyed the most, but they also caused consternation among them regarding the portrayal of marriage in the film. The plan to move to Paris is abandoned when April is pregnant.

A baby is in the way of living the life we deserve

The moral predicament in *Revolutionary Road* is April's third pregnancy which scraps their plans of departure for Paris. In the scene (Figure 12), they are a happy couple with plans to escape the tedium and the emptiness in their lives living in the suburbs with a

job that fills Frank with ennui and create vexations for April. By the time April finds out she is pregnant, they are back to fighting, similar to the beginning segments of the film. This suggests that pregnancy is not the key issue here, that it is the marital problems that already exist between them that have not ironed out. Hence, the participants actually focused on the state of marriage in the film and not the decision to abort or keep the baby. In the following scene, April does not consider any other alternatives (Figure 13.1). She refers to abortion as a preferred choice so they can still move to Paris.

Figure 13.1: April's pregnancy

APRIL: I'm pregnant, that's all.

FRANK: (incredulous) What...?

APRIL: (in tears) Frank, I meant to wait until the kids were in bed to tell you, but I just found – I've been pretty sure all week and today I went to the doctor and now I can't even pretend it's not true.

FRANK: (resigned) How long?

APRIL: Ten weeks.

FRANK: Ten weeks? Ten weeks, (moving towards April) and you wait until now to tell me?

APRIL: There are things we can do. We don't have to let this stop us from going, do we? Remember that girl at school I told you about...? As long as we take care of it before 12 weeks, it's fine.

FRANK: (cont'd) 12 weeks... we have time to decide, right?

APRIL: (still in Frank's arms, nods) Right. I love you.

FRANK: (looking at the off-screen calendar over April's shoulder) I love you too.

Camera cuts to calendar on the wall.

Figure 13.2: 12 weeks

It is not clear what April's motivation is to keep the news of her pregnancy from Frank, even though she is unsure of the actual status of her pregnancy. Her remark in this scene to Frank that he has not guessed, suggests that she could have been quite certain of the pregnancy before. Frank does not seem agreeable to the idea about terminating the pregnancy but reassures April. In Figure 13.2, he looks at the calendar and the audience has a hint he is not open to the idea of termination. This is evident when he comes to the kitchen one day and announces it is already 12 weeks, which is past the threshold for a safe abortion.

April and Frank have a fight after Frank reveals to Shep (their neighbour) at the beach about Knox offering him lots of money and a promotion, which was unknown to April. A terse conversation between April and Frank ensues at the beach and then Frank walks off. That evening in the house:

APRIL: You don't want to go, do you?

FRANK: Oh Come on, April. Of course I do.

APRIL: No, you don't! Because you've never tried at anything. And if you don't try at anything you can't fail.

FRANK: What the hell do you mean I don't try? I support you, don't I? I, I pay for this house. I work ten hours a day at a job I can't stand.

APRIL: You don't have to!

FRANK: Bullshit! Look, I'm not happy about it. But I have the backbone not to run away from my responsibilities!

APRIL: It takes backbone to lead the life you want, Frank.

Frank returns with a device and confronts April (Figure 14.1). She says she is terminating the pregnancy for his sake so they can go to Paris.

FRANK: How can it be for me when the thought of it makes my stomach turn over, for God's sake? (He turns away).

Figure 14.1: Device

Figure 14.2: Shouting match

APRIL: But I've had two children. Doesn't that count in my favour?

FRANK: Christ, April, the fact that you even put it that way! You make it seems like having children is, is some sort of a god damned punishment.

APRIL: I love my children, Frank.

FRANK: And you're sure about that, huh?

Frank could be referring to an earlier interaction between April and their daughter where April is exasperated and tells their daughter: "I don't feel like explaining everything fifteen times to somebody who's too bored and silly to listen."

APRIL: What the hell is that supposed to mean?

FRANK: April, you just said our daughter was a mistake. How do I know you didn't try to get rid of her, or Michael for that matter?

Figure 14.3: Frank

Figure 14.4: April

APRIL: No...

FRANK: How do I know you didn't try to flush our entire fucking family down the toilet?

APRIL: No that's not true. Of course I didn't.

FRANK: But how do I know April?

April starts crying. At this point, he offers her medical help, insinuating that she is not normal to want to terminate her pregnancy "so she can live out some kind of God damn fantasy."

April's pregnancy means she may not be able to work in Paris as intended if they move.

Throughout the film, once April receives Frank's acquiesce to go to Paris, she takes action. However, Frank's job offer comes at an inopportune time. April thinks he turns down the job offer but he did not. Given her pregnancy, he would likely take the offer, as he has just told her they cannot have the baby in Paris. April just wants to get away from the place. Thus, her motivation is get away whether or not she has the baby at home or in Paris. It is not

clear why she decides later to abort.

Thoughts on Domestic Partnerships

With the exception of one, some female participants were a little more sympathetic to Frank while two male participants thought he was the one at fault in the marriage.

Agatha: “Frank is self-centred, tries to love April ... self –delusional...how little he understands [April].”

Frey thought Frank was “cowardly” but April makes him “unworthy so he went astray.”

Freda disagreed: “seems like Frank is the one who’s trying very hard to keep everything together.” She elaborated:

He is accommodating, judging by how April could convince him to move with one short conversation, but he also sees the big picture, how they should make sure they have got enough money for their child and a bigger house and April’s well-being during the pregnancy.

Athlyn: “I think the film reinforced my perspective on marriage as something that’s full of tension and definitely not smooth sailing.”

Agnes explained:

Cos we always thought that marriages will last, and they have the very typical like, cute meeting, like he made her laugh at a puppy or something from the start, and then it’s just sad to like, see it slowly disintegrate, and then you can tell that they still love each other but it’s just toxic, and yah... (voice softens) It’s quite upsetting.”

Most participants like Buffy said the film portrayed two extremes of “explosive and uncompromising” characters in a marriage. They also questioned April’s mental health in the following scene when she tells Frank she does not love him anymore (Figure 15).

Referring to the following scene, Cato was sympathetic to Frank and was moved by the scene when he recalled in the interview:

There was this part where they fought and he kept saying that he loves her, he loves her and he says that she loves him but she doesn't and that kind of thing. I think in that kind of situation, any guy would just hit her or just go out of the house, but he persists until a point where it's past a breaking point a normal guy would have, and he just went up and cried.

Marriage is (dramatically) ugly

Figure 15: April's mental health

APRIL: (voice calm) But I don't. I hate you. You were just some boy who made me laugh at a party once and now I loathe the sight of you.

Camera on Frank as he looks briefly away, disbelieving, hurt.

APRIL: What're you going to do now? Are you going to hit me? To show me how much you love me?

FRANK: Oh, no, don't worry, I can't be bothered! You're not worth the

trouble it'd take to hit you. You're not worth the powder it'd take to blow you up. You're an empty -- empty, hollow shell of a woman.

Frank begins to shake with tears in his eyes.

FRANK: (cont'd) I mean, what the hell are you living in my house for if you hate me so much? Why the hell are you married to me? What the hell are you doing carrying my child.

He points at her belly.

FRANK: (cont'd) Why didn't you just get rid of it, when you had the chance to? Because listen to me. Listen to me, I got news for you. I wish to God that you had.

As Frank says this, the camera cuts to April's face, thinking through the possibility of terminating the pregnancy. After the quarrel, April terminates her pregnancy the next day.

Figure 16.1: After the abortion

Figure 16.2: Gone wrong

Disassociations with Abortion

The film portrays the choice lies with the woman as some participants pointed out. April's decision to abort was based on act utilitarianism but in this case she fails to get any desirable consequences out of it. It could be argued that her death has a bad outcome for the family. Frank is shown at the hospital devastated at the news of her death. Later, Frank moves to the city with the children who are left without a mother. The film positions April as having made the wrong decision because it was outside the safe threshold when she did the abortion and she dies from it. Largely due to this, the participants pointed out, she does not fulfil her spousal and parental obligations as much as Frank does. As well, the scene before the abortion when she has breakfast with Frank seems eerie as one participant pointed out. So the participants were unsure if April meant to commit suicide at the same time since she knows it is not safe to have an abortion. They did not quite agree with the reason for abortion

in this film, even if they thought choice a significant factor when deciding to terminate pregnancies. Their associations with abortion are also dependent on desirable outcomes.

Participant Frey said:

So when she's standing at the window there, she looked very lonely, a lone figure going through all this by herself, and there was the blood. And then, you just kind of know that something seems wrong. And when she called the 911, you can't even see her face. It was just her voice... So, I thought that was very frightening because I guess sometimes you don't have to see everything. Just hearing her voice, it was very weak. You don't have to see it to know that something very bad is going to happen. You kind of know that she will die at that moment.

Participant Frederick: "I think she's not very responsible for herself but at the same time, you can tell she has kind of given up already. So, she doesn't really care if it does any good or does any harm to her. She just like, don't care... Yes, potentially killing two persons."

In the interview, Buffy did not agree with the self-induced abortion either.

Buffy: But she did it on her own without any professional help at all, and I think that's kind of very dangerous.

I: So, her action in doing that, how would you term her action?

Buffy: Suicidal, kind of. Yeah, I think there's some depression also, related to pregnancy. I kinda perceive that she was affected by depression around that period already, so I thought that might actually influence her choices.

In the interview, Athlyn's thoughts on abortion suggest the importance of spousal support in decision-making.

I: What was it about the abortion scene that made it chilling for you?

Athlyn: I think the fact that the blood was just so apparent. Like, nothing was censored or hidden from our view. It just showed how macabre and gory the whole thing was, and I think the worst part of it was how she had to resort to that choice on her own. There was no support from her partner. Sort of, I don't have a choice. This is what I have to do. I think that was the sad part for me.

The bad consequence of the self-induced abortion had a tempering effect on the participants especially viewing the scenes (Figures 16.1-16.2) and reflecting that Frank was not there supporting his wife. It anchors the film's premise about emptiness and hopelessness of everyday domesticated life, which affected the participants' views on relationships.

(Dis)engagements with *Revolutionary Road*

For two of the participants, the film was their most preferred.

Frey said: "It's the rawest of the movies...even though it was heavily dramatized; it's something that could possibly happen to someone."

Athlyn remarked: "*Revolutionary Road*...because it plays out like a drama more." She added in the interview that the actors played a part in her enjoyment and engagement with the film:

I think seeing Leo and Kate Winslet on screen together is always a pleasure, and for me the movie played like a drama ... I was just so attached to whatever was going on between the characters because at every moment, the nature of the relationship was changing. Yeah, like the way they portrayed their relationship just gripped me throughout ... the relationship was never stagnant. It was always full of some emotion and you are so attached to their emotion.

Six participants had positive experiences with the film.

Batista: “Reflective – reminded about the fragility of relationships and how it can turn sour or sweet in a blink.”

Buffy: “Intense, especially the fights.”

Burnette: “Watching this movie made me consider what my hopes and dreams are, and what I really want out of this life.”

Two participants stated the film modified their perspectives on marriage. Their statements below point to the fact that the film subverts their notion that marriage is a state of marital harmony.

Agnes: “Tough to actually maintain a marriage. Hard work and labour and requires maintenance.”

Augusta: “The film made me see how marriage gets complicated.”

This subversion also affected some participants with the negativity portrayed in *Revolutionary Road* in terms of relationships, stirring undesirable feelings for them.

Augusta: “Sad”

Buena: “Slightly depressing”

For Freda, the film was her least preferred. She explained:

“I feel it’s really very sad when you see one character trying so hard, and the other wasn’t even touched. Someone that’s like, so cold, blind to the other person’s love.”

BREAKING DAWN Part 1

The film comes in second for modifying the most perspectives and for positive film experiences. In *Breaking Dawn*, the issues identified were abortion, pro-choice versus pro-life, rights of unborn and mother, family ties, loyalty and betrayal, mortality, moral values, love, sacrifice. Five participants had watched the film before. 13 participants found scenes meaningful to them while two participants made no selection. Of these two, one felt the film was unrealistic and another did not find any scenes particularly meaningful. However, one participant who hated vampire films found some scenes meaningful.

Breaking Dawn engages the imagination and invites the “moral endorsement” of agency, choice, and responsibility through an embodied experience (Jones 13) since it positions the relationships between humans, werewolves, and vampires as utopic sites of moral possibility. Even though vampires and wolves are not humans and thus cannot be held morally accountable for their actions according to moral principles that apply to persons, their thoughts, plans, and actions reveal human agency as they ruminate on their choices in morally responsible ways in this film. The wolves can communicate with each other through their thoughts with their human faculties and reasoning. While in human form, they can shape-shift to protect their tribe and the other humans living in the area from roaming vampires. The reason the Cullens are able to co-exist peacefully with humans is because they have signed a treaty with the Quileute tribe not to hunt humans for food and have adhered to the agreement. For all intents and purposes, the Cullen vampires are valued as persons who are “part of a moral community” as they are self-motivated, conscious, rational, and communicative (Michaud 39-41). Edward can also communicate with Jacob through reading his thoughts when the latter is in wolf form through their human senses. Thus, the humans, wolves, and vampires are the bodies on screen, which are sites of contests between morally right and wrong actions as they deliberate and act out their intentions. We can, therefore,

assess them accordingly within the moral framework as both “the moral endorsement and the narrative ... appeal to our evaluative attitudes toward [them]” (Jones 13-14).

Character Codes

Table 7: Character Codes in *Breaking Dawn Part 1*

Moral Codes	Bella	Edward	Others	Total
Aristotle Virtues	2	0	0	2
Kant Principles	1	8	9	18
Mill Utilitarianism	1	1	7	9
Total Codings				29

Others: Most of the codings according to Kant principles centre on the Cullens’ respect for human lives, helping Bella through her pregnancy, and risking their lives for Bella. Two of the Kant codings refer to Seth’s actions to leave the pack and protect Bella against his own wolf brothers. There were seven codings for rule utilitarianism which applied to all the actions involved in protecting the tribe and other humans from Bella and her unborn child. Since the Quileutes do not know the extent of the foetus’s vampiric propensities once it is born, they want to kill it to prevent the possible slaughter of their tribe and other humans.

Bella: The two codings from Aristotelian virtues pertain to Bella’s courage in deciding to birth the foetus in spite of the harm it causes her. She is valiant in her suffering and tries to hold on to life until the birth. The coding for one act utilitarianism is for her action in getting Rosalie to protect the foetus from the rest of the Cullens. One coding is for Kantian parental responsibility in protecting her child from harm which the participants agreed with. There are

no codings for spousal duties but the participants indicated there were two instances where she has Edward's welfare in mind when they were arguing about Bella's probable demise.

Edward: One coding for act utilitarianism pertains to his action in getting Bella back from their honeymoon for Carlisle to get rid of the foetus. His action is based on the unknown status of the foetus's capabilities and the prophecy from the old woman at their honeymoon villa that death will result for Bella. Most of the codings according to Kant were centred on his actions in protecting Bella and asking Jacob to speak with her about the pregnancy, as it will be the cause of her death, and his care while she is ill at home. Other codings according to Kant were for actions in protecting the family from the attacking wolves while some members of his family are away obtaining blood to save Bella. Included in the codings was one of parental responsibility to protect the foetus when Rose is tempted to feed on the blood when she slices Bella's abdomen with a scalpel. If she attacks Bella, the foetus will die as Bella will not survive the vampire's venom. But this was a subtlety in the film which was not perceived by the participants. There were two codings for fulfilling spousal obligations in trying to revive Bella but the participants indicated three instances where Edward fulfils those duties to Bella, in caring for her during the pregnancy, protecting, and reviving her.

Spouses and Family

The participants found the running thread of familial relationships in *Breaking Dawn* appealing to them and they agreed with the notion of spouses as articulated in the film. They referred to the wedding scenes (Figures 17.1 – 17.3) and subsequent events in the film, about the vampires sacrificing themselves for a human because the latter is part of the family, as strong associations with the moral content.

Agatha who did not have a positive experience said the film was “unrealistic [and] failure of birth control used as a plot point in so many of these films” were reasons she did not engage with it. Nonetheless, for her, the portrayal of spouses and family was a reflection of her own lived experiences. Referring to the wedding scene (Figures 17.1 – 17.3), she said: “I agree with [Edward’s] statement” about spouses and also concurred with Esme’s words about family cherishing each other. Agatha added, “I guess I am lucky enough to agree with these sentiments.”

In reference to Esme’s toast at the wedding and her subsequent statement about protecting Bella from the werewolves, Frey described her as a “pillar of support and unconditional love.” Athlyn remarked: “What Esme said is admirable and something I respect because she followed through with her statement.” Athlyn was referring to the scene where some of the Cullens plan to get more blood for Bella when they discover that the foetus prefers that for nutrition. To do so, they risk their lives because the werewolves were waiting to kill Bella. Esme’s wedding toast and her statement that includes Bella as a family member resonated with the participants with some remarking that the film showed family may not be just about blood ties.

The exchange later between Seth leaving his own pack and joining Jacob in the fight against his brother to protect Bella has Kantian undertones because the action is the right thing to do – to save a human life. This conversation was particularly appreciated by the participants because of Seth’s loyalty to Bella. Augusta puts it this way: “Family means to accept another person and protect them regardless of the trouble it may bring.” Despite the film being his least preferred because Batista did not see “any substance” in the film and had a negative experience, as he is “disinterested and disgusted by idea of vampires,” Batista had strong associations with the moral content in relation to family. He added in the interview:

Family does not always signify blood relation but rather successive choices and actions that give meaning to the word family...The other two werewolves who would fight alongside Jacob against family because that is the ‘right thing’ to do – to be able to behave like that requires true dedication to principle.

The Wedding

In the wedding toast, Edward says: “It’s an extraordinary thing to meet someone you can bare your soul too and who will accept you for what you are. I’ve been waiting what seems to be a very long time to get beyond to what I am...and with Bella I feel like I can finally begin...”

The participants all agreed that spouses should be accepting and supportive of each other.

Figure 17.1: Edward speaks his vows

Figure 17.2: Bella vows “in sickness and in health”

Figure 17.3: In the presence of family

The series of over-the-shoulder shots as Edward and Bella each say a phrase of the wedding vows to each other in turn (Figures 17.1 and 17.2) entrench their domestic partnership firmly within the extended family, which comprise humans, Quileutes, and vampires (Figure 17.3).

The ‘vegetarian’ vampires present at the wedding are cousins to the Cullens in the sense that they, like the Cullens, choose to feed only on animal blood. The Quileutes have a link to Bella because of her relationship with Jacob in *Twilight*, developed in *New Moon* and resolved on her part in *Eclipse*, when she accepts Edward’s marriage proposal. On Jacob’s relationship with Bella in this film, however, participants commented that Jacob is being protective of her and did not think any romantic feelings on Jacob’s part is reciprocated. As well, in *Eclipse*, the wolves have fought alongside the Cullens in destroying other vampires who feed on humans. More importantly, the wedding vows set up the relationship for the audience as one of equal partnership, challenged later in the narrative when Edward and Bella are at odds with her pregnancy. At the wedding, Edward represents the vampires and Bella for the humans, with the Quileutes as the protector of human lives and mediators with the Cullen vampires, so the three factions can co-exist in the same space as a family. The moral predicament concerning the foetus splits these factions later, and causes rifts between members of the same familial unit.

During the wedding toasts, we begin to see the unequivocal acceptance of Bella by the Cullen vampires into their family, when both Emmett and Alice welcome Bella as their sister.⁷⁶ Esme thanks Bella’s parents, Renee and Charlie, “for bringing such a wonderful person into the world and into our lives. We will cherish and protect her forever.”

In the following conversation, Jacob is surprised that the vampires will risk their lives

⁷⁶ Emmett, Rosalie, Jasper, Alice are not blood brothers/sisters of Edward. They were all, including Esme (who takes on the matriarchal role), created by Carlisle, the head of the Cullen family. They were turned immortal as they were suffering or dying from injuries or illness which Carlisle could not treat, even as a doctor. For the purposes of interacting with humans they present themselves as a family. Both Emmett and Rosalie are actually a romantic couple and so are Jasper and Alice.

for a human even when he warns them that Sam, the leader of the Quileute wolves, will hunt them down.

JACOB: Carlisle, you're the enemy now. Sam won't hesitate. You will be slaughtered.

CARLISLE: Emmett will come with us.

JACOB: That won't be enough.

CARLISLE: We have no choice, Jacob. If there's anything we can do to save her, we have to try.

JACOB: You'd risk your lives for her?

ESME: Of course we would. Bella's a part of our family now.

Jacob sees that the Cullens are a real family and decides to betray his pack by luring them away from guarding the Cullen's house. He finds that unlike his pack, the vampires show him what a family really means.

Predicament of the Cullens and Quileutes

Bella's pregnancy results in a predicament for the Quileutes and the Cullens. Bella discovers something moving inside her abdomen after she retches during the honeymoon. Edward goes into shock at the discovery. Meanwhile, since he can communicate his thoughts and Alice is able to see future events, Alice calls him. Bella answers the phone instead since Edward is immobile (Figure 18).

Carlisle tells Edward to bring Bella home and Edward says to Bella while he's packing their things that they will remove that "thing", referring to the foetus inside her. Bella is resolved to protect her foetus and calls Rosalie ahead to pre-empt her to prepare for their arrival home.

Figure 18: Edward in shock

Since a human is weaker than a vampire, Bella needs a protector who can defend her foetus's life should any of them, particularly Edward, wants to remove the foetus from Bella. It is the tension in balancing all their moral choices, which engages the audience's ethical imagination as we watch the characters contest between morally wrong and right actions, particularly between Edward and Bella, and between Jacob and the wolves.

In the scene below, Jacob finds out more about Bella's condition. The Cullens, with the exception of Rosalie, do not view the foetus as human, since they have never encountered a human giving birth to something created by a vampire. Their knowledge is based on young children who are turned to vampires, and because the children cannot control their inclinations and bloodlust, they will feed indiscriminately. A vampire child will not be able to understand the Cullens' 'vegetarian' diet and will kill all the humans it comes into contact. Thus, the Cullens think Bella's foetus would be the same as a child who has been turned so they want to remove the foetus to protect the humans.

JACOB: You did this!

EDWARD: We didn't know it was even possible.

JACOB: What is it?

CARLISLE: ... not sure. Ultrasounds and needles won't penetrate the embryonic sac.

ALICE: I can't see it, either. And I can't see Bella's future anymore.

CARLISLE: We've been researching legends, but there isn't much to go on. What we do know is that it's strong. And fast-growing.

JACOB: Why haven't you done anything? Take it out of her!

ROSALIE: This is none of your business, dog.

ESME: Rose! All this fighting isn't good for Bella.

ALICE: The *foetus* isn't good for Bella.

ROSALIE: Say the word, Alice. *Baby*. It's just a little baby.

JASPER: Possibly.

JACOB: Carlisle, you've gotta do something.

BELLA: No! It's not his decision. It's not any of yours.

The predicament here is nobody can do anything about terminating the foetus because knowing the vampires are stronger, Bella has Rosalie on her side to protect her from the family. Rosalie is sympathetic to Bella's decision as she has always wanted children of her own. This point is revealed in *Eclipse* when she recounts her story to Bella about being raped by her fiancée and his friends and left to die. Later, Carlisle finds her dying on the street and turns her. To get Bella to change her mind, Edward asks Jacob for help in desperation. We know from the exchange that Bella will likely die.

JACOB: I always knew you'd destroy her.

EDWARD: She thinks Carlisle can turn her at the last minute, like he did for me and Esme.

JACOB: Can he?

EDWARD: Probability is ... slight. And if her heart fails ... Look, Jacob, I need you to do something for me. (Jacob scoffs)

EDWARD: For her. You have a connection with her that I'll never understand. Maybe you could talk to her, change her mind. You can keep her alive.

JACOB: And if I can't?

EDWARD: If she dies, you get what you always wanted. To kill me.

At this point, Jacob goes back into the house to talk to Bella but she is adamant and reassures him she will be fine. Here, the audience knows that Jacob has lingering romantic feelings for Bella still, demonstrated in a later scene when he cuddles with Bella to keep her warm in the presence of the Cullens. Both conversations, between Edward and Jacob, and between Bella and Jacob, show the long standing animosity Jacob has for Edward, as the latter is perceived as the rival to Bella's affections.

JACOB: Come on. You can spout that crap to your bloodsucker, but you don't fool me. I can see what that thing's doing to you. It's a killer, Bella.

BELLA: You're wrong.

JACOB: And when you die, what was the point? Of me loving you, you loving him. How is that right for anyone? Because I sure don't see it. Listen to me, Bella. Please? Just don't do this. Live, okay? Please.

BELLA: Jake, everything's gonna be okay. (Jacob begins to walk away).
Jacob, don't go.

JACOB: I know how this ends. And I'm not sticking around to watch.

Jacob leaves the house, upset at the probability of Bella dying. He changes into wolf form and while he gallops, he communicates to the rest of the pack. In the film, the audience can hear these thoughts articulated by the wolves referring to the foetus as a “monstrosity” and an “abomination”.

Killing to protect society

In Figure 19.1, Jacob (brown wolf in the middle on lower ground) is surrounded and the pack is communicating that Bella’s unborn must be destroyed to save the tribe and humans. Sam, the leader of the wolf pack, claims Bella’s “choice affects us all.” It is unclear why Jacob runs off to the wolves after seeing Bella.

Figure 19.1: Jacob with the pack

Jacob is part of the pack so it can be surmised that the wolves need to know if there are threats to the land and to the humans. But he may not have foreseen the outcome of his decision. The wolves, with the exception of Seth and Jacob, all declare that the foetus must

be killed before it is born. Thus, Bella needs to be killed as well. In the scene, Jacob is surprised at the wolves' reaction to his news and is silent until Sam gives the order. Seth, the smaller brown wolf to Jacob's left, closest to the logs, (Figure 19.1) is upset that they are going to kill Bella.

Figure 19.2: Sam gives the edict

Jacob reminds them about the treaty and that Bella is human. But Sam says the treaty is void. This point is debatable as the treaty is between the Cullens and the tribe. Thus far, nobody has broken the agreement. The Quileute's stipulation in the treaty is that no vampire in the vicinity of their land can feed on humans in exchange for the wolves not attacking the vampires. If a vampire bites another human, the treaty is void. Additionally, the Cullens cannot travel into the Quileute territory and the wolves cannot encroach on the area surrounding the Cullen's house, otherwise each may attack the other for trespass. In the minds of the wolves however, the value of the outcome of killing Bella and the foetus will result in the prevention of massive loss of lives even if no harm has been done yet.

The Quileutes have strict rules regarding the preservation of their tribe and the

humans. Their decision to kill Bella to get rid of the foetus is morally right according to Mill's rule utilitarianism. Sam and the wolves are justified in taking action because the foetus is unable to be reasoned with. But their decision is not morally right where Bella is concerned. They have no right to interfere with Bella's pregnancy against her will, according to Mill, even if it is to prevent harm to others. She could be reasoned with however, which Jacob tries to do, but fails.

Jacob does not agree with the planned attack that night because he harbours romantic feelings for Bella. Sam tries to compel him to follow orders (Figure 19.3). Jacob bows down under Sam's command but slowly rises up. He declares he will not follow Sam as he is the rightful leader of the wolf pack, being a descendant of his grandfather who used to lead the tribe. At the time, Jacob did not want to be the leader. He declares he will not follow Sam's orders and runs off. Seth follows him shortly. A little later in the narrative, Seth's sister, Leah also joins them even though she dislikes the Cullens as they are vampires.

Figure 19.3: Confrontation between wolves

The following conversation between Seth and Jacob reveals their motivation for leaving the pack. They both want to preserve life, regardless of the consequences. This scene and the ensuing defense of the Cullens that see wolf siblings fighting each other were memorable for many participants.

SETH: I won't stand behind him.

JACOB: Oh, yes, you will. I'm not kidding. Get out of here.

SETH: Is that an order? Gonna make me bow down, too?

JACOB: I'm not ordering anyone. Look, I'm just going off on my own here, okay?

SETH: Great and I've got your back.

JACOB: No, you don't. If Sam comes after Bella, are you really ready to fight your own brothers? Your sister?

SETH: If it's the right thing to do.

Killing to Protect Individuals

On the eve of their wedding Edward drops by to check if Bella has cold feet about being married. He confesses what he did in the past, as Bella only knows Edward feeds on animal blood since their relationship began. Edward reveals that he defied Carlisle once and preyed on criminals to prevent harm to other humans. Since he can read peoples' thoughts, he stalks and kills men who prey on women before the men can commit the nefarious acts on them. In a flashback that Edward recounts to Bella, the audience is shown what Edward did. His motivation is to taste human blood, which Carlisle forbids, so Edward does not feed indiscriminately.

EDWARD: All the men I killed were monsters. And so was I.

BELLA: Edward, they were all murderers. You probably saved more lives than you took.

EDWARD: Bella, that's what I told myself. But they were all human beings. I looked into their eyes as they died and I saw who I was, and what I was capable of.

What makes the confession morally provocative is the dichotomy between two moral frameworks: utilitarian and deontological, represented by Bella and Edward respectively. From a Kantian perspective, Edward's action cannot be willed as a universal maxim as it is a logical contradiction, that is, there would not be any people left if everyone does what he does. Further, it violates one's perfect duty to avoid harming others even if the end result is desirable. Bella's standpoint is associative with the view that killing a small proportion of people is justifiable if it prevents them from harming others in future. This view takes into account the maximum benefit to the greatest number of people. One of the weaknesses of Bella's reasoning is the difficulty in calculating how much of the perceived 'good' would result if one acts this way. The principle also robs one's autonomy to choose freely. In other words, in killing the criminals, they do not have the option to choose otherwise morally right actions. What is worth noting is that Edward can 'hear' their thoughts and know for certain that they will continue to prey on others. This makes it challenging for the audience to decide whether the Kantian Universal Law argument is valid.

Associations with Kant and Mill

Thus far, I have shown that *Breaking Dawn* has significant moral content for the audience; in particular showing the two moral dichotomies at play in issues relating to killing to protect life. In later sections, abortion as a form of preserving life is also at stake. These

provided resources for the participants to ruminate on right and wrong moral actions as the film depicts both supporting and opposing arguments to killing. As participant, Batista reasoned in the interview in reference to Edward killing criminals:

On one hand, it's utilitarianism because you are killing for the greater good, right? You're killing one so the one won't kill like, five more or something. But you are killing them, so you are like Kant's deontology, like, you are... he felt like a monster. Like, killing is just not right.

I: So, which one would you pick?

Batista: I think I would agree lah, that Edward did the right thing.

I: The utilitarianism...

Batista: Because I feel like if you are born as a normal human being, but you don't exhibit... Okay, I won't say exhibit... traits of a human being ...

I: It's okay, you can go along and say it.

Batista: If you make like the, this decision to not be one, right? To forgo your human instincts and you start... I mean killing people is not normal. I don't think it's something that needs to be taught. It's something that is innate.

In the transcript above, Batista leans towards the Kantian view that killing is wrong. In terms of abortion, there was a leaning towards a utilitarian view, given that that is the best outcome for everyone. In saving Bella, the foetus would be destroyed which results in the best outcome for every human as it would be prevented from killing. As Cato said in reference to the dialogue between Carlisle, Bella, and Edward: "Given me in Edward's position, I would do anything to save her, even at the expense of aborting the baby."

The dialogue below also prompted participants to reflect if a father's choice should be regarded. Frey said: the "bonds of marriage bind decisions and consequences of actions of one on the other spouse." According to Agnes, each person "has a right to craft their own terms and define the limit to the choices each can make." Agnes also added that the labelling of the foetus and baby between Alice and Rosalie created meanings for her: "[it] highlights debate in film whether ethical to kill a foetus or not, and whether mother should have right to make a choice."

Whose Choice should prevail?

For Bella's pregnancy, we cannot fault Edward for wanting to remove the foetus because it is thought to be vampire child and thus has no moral intuition, not like the humans whom he killed who have the perspicacity to reason but choose morally wrong actions instead. In terms of the foetus, there is a reversal of ethical orientation for both Bella and Edward. The following scene shows that Edward should have a right as well in the decision to keep the foetus, according to some participants. In an exchange between Carlisle, Edward, and Bella about the foetus, Carlisle says that Bella's "rib is cracked, but there are no splinters." Barely containing his anger, Edward tells Bella the foetus is crushing her from the inside.

CARLISLE: The foetus isn't compatible with your body. It's too strong. It won't allow you to get the nutrition you need. It's starving you by the hour. I can't stop it and I can't slow it down. At this rate, your heart will give out before you can deliver.

BELLA: Then I'll hold on as long as I can.

CARLISLE: [interrupts] Bella, there are some conditions that even venom can't overcome. You understand? I'm sorry.

Carlisle then leaves the room and Edward tells Bella he can't live without her and asks her how he would be able to even tolerate something if it kills her.

BELLA: It's not his fault. You have to accept what is.

EDWARD: (yells) Because you've given me no choice! Bella, we're supposed to be partners. Remember? But you decided this on your own. You've decided to leave me.

BELLA: Don't see it that way!

EDWARD: Well I have no other way to see it. Cause it's me who will lose you. And I don't choose that. I don't choose that. (leaves angrily).

Within the Kantian framework, abortion is morally impermissible even if the mother's life is in danger. A foetus can only be aborted if it is an unintended consequence of saving a mother's life. In this situation, Bella needs nutrition or she will die. In fact, the foetus is already causing her harm from inside her body. What Carlisle could do is try to remove the foetus so that it is not using Bella as a vessel for its own survival since nobody knows what the thing is.⁷⁷ The female housekeeper at the honeymoon villa knows that Edward is some kind of demon and she foresees death for the pregnant Bella. If Carlisle removes the foetus, the intent must be to save Bella's life. Because Kant holds that killing is impermissible but at the same time, one has a moral duty to preserve life, the surgery is viewed as morally permissible.⁷⁸ However, in Bella's case, there is no proof that the foetus is not human and

⁷⁷ Assuming that abortion is morally wrong, Judith Thomson gives a thought experiment on whether it is permissible for a person to use the body of another to sustain life in "A Defense of Abortion," pp.47-66.

⁷⁸ See Woodward, the *Doctrine of Double Effect*.

thus a sentient being, and removing it would therefore be morally wrong if it dies. The rest of the Cullens and Jacob want to protect her from dying.

From demon to foetus/baby and a scary birth

Bella's birth was precipitated by her fall as she reaches for the cup of blood that Rosalie hands her. We hear the crunching sound as her spine snaps and she falls to the floor (Figure 20). The birth, resuscitation, and the transformation elicited responses that dealt with the participants' experience of what Bella actually goes through.

Figure 20: Bella's fall

After the fall, the next scene starts with an establishing shot of Bella in bed, with Alice, Rosalie, Edward and Jacob in the room. While Alice is on the phone with Carlisle who is giving instructions, we hear Alice's side of the conversation. The placenta has detached so the foetus needs to be removed for it to survive. They inject Bella with morphine

while she screams in pain, due to her broken spine and the foetus. The birth scene elicited the sense-making experience of the body as both material subject and object for the participants.

The sequence is from 1:26:45 to 1:28:05 for the successful birth of the baby and lasts until 1:38:48 in the efforts to revive Bella after the birth. The entire scene from the time of delivery to Bella's death is 12 minutes. With the engagement of the sequence of events, my body mediated between my ethical consciousness and the ethical dimensions of the fictional world, which aroused my visual and aural senses in appreciation of the moral content. The engagement provoked a reading that grounds and informs the ways in which we relate to the world, that of our own realities and that of the fictional constructions, and how we make sense of them. In a series of quick shots in succession, our eyes were directed at each character's action. The effect on the audience is as if we were experiencing the birth.

EDWARD: Let the morphine spread.

ROSALIE: There's no time. He's dying.

BELLA: Get him out now!

Rosalie proceeds to cut Bella open and remove the foetus without waiting for the morphine to work. However, the camera is focused on Rosalie's hand holding the bloody scalpel and her transfixed stare. At the exact moment, Jacob rushes her and both fall to the ground as the scalpel clatters.

EDWARD: Alice, get her out of here!

BELLA: (exclaims) Rosalie! Ow!

Alice escorts Rosalie out to prevent her from feeding on Bella while the camera moves back to Bella's POV (Figure 21.1)

JACOB: Save her! You've got to change her!

EDWARD: I can't, not whilst he's still in there. I got to get him out first.

Figure 21.1: Bella

Figure 21.2: Edward delivering baby

JACOB: Stay, Bella. Stay focused. Keep your heart beating.

BELLA: No! He's suffocating!

Bella is writhing in pain and screaming at the same time the exchange between Jacob and Edward is taking place while Edward decides what to do.

As Edward's teeth tears through her abdomen and placenta, I experienced a sensation of soreness, which began as a throb and progressed to a dull ache as the foetus is forcibly expelled from her body (Figure 21.2). I was also acutely aware of a hot sensation that spread from my lower back, stomach, and legs in the space of a few seconds. It was so shocking that I gasped audibly during her ordeal.⁷⁹ The birth sequence involved my perceptual engagement with my physical body before my ethical consciousness had a chance to analyse the experience even as the "immediacy of contact" made me confront, albeit at the back of my mind, the magnitude of Bella's decision to have the baby (Stadler 30).⁸⁰

The POV shot of Bella as Edward delivers the baby had me strangely in its grip (Figure 21.2). My body assumed Bella's skin during the sequence. In other words, to borrow an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty work, I am "able to correlate my body" and Bella's through "a primordial reciprocity" (qtd. in Wegenstein 26). When the baby is delivered, we see Jacob's smile as Edward happily holds the baby out to Bella and places it on her chest. A slight crunch is heard followed by the close-up of Bella's squirm when Renesmee⁸¹ bites her. Edward takes the baby from her. That afforded a few moments' respite to process the onslaught of the film body on my body during the birth. Nonetheless, my feelings had barely subsided when I was assailed by waves of helplessness at Bella's decision as the camera cuts to Edward and Jacob in a succession of limited POV shots. Suddenly, Jacob calls out to Bella.

⁷⁹ The sequence was so realistic that there were seizures experienced by the U.S. audience when the film was first shown in 2011. See Roberts, "Breaking down during *Breaking Dawn*."

⁸⁰ Stadler, J. *Pulling Focus*. 2008.

⁸¹ Renesmee is the baby. Before Bella's spine cracked, she was telling Edward and Jacob of the names she has chosen for either the male or female child as the gender was unknown then.

Jacob starts with the resuscitation first while Edward hands the baby to Rosalie who has regained her composure and takes the baby away. Jacob cannot get Bella to breathe and Edward takes over the resuscitation while Jacob stands and watches.

My perception then shifted to nobody in particular for a moment when Bella heaves her last breath with the zoom out. This is due to what Sobchack defines as a “film body” which enabled me to view the omniscient ‘other’, that is, the viewer who looks at the film’s subject when the shots are not confined to any particular POV (*Address of the Eye* 203).

The desolation increased as I am implicated in their torment at confronting the possibility of losing her. Jacob is angry when he sees Bella motionless. He starts to leave, telling Edward that he deserves to live with Bella’s death. Hence, Jacob will not kill him. Edward, never taking his eyes off Bella, does not respond as he keeps up his efforts (Figure 21.3).

Phenomenological Experiences

In the lead up to the birth scene, the sound of bones snapping as Bella retrieves her cup, the birth, resuscitation and transformation scenes provoked a physical response from the participants. In the interview Noland said:

the scene was quite graphic. It was unexpected because the flow of the movie was like, romance, romance, romance ... I mean the part where she dropped the cup and (makes snapping sound) broke her bone. I think from there ... I mean my heart rate went up.

Although Athlyn had an overall positive film experience with *Breaking Dawn*, the birth scene was not significant for her: “slightly gory considering the blood and the tension created by the music but I was largely unmoved.”

For others, the pain they felt as the scene unfolded with Bella going into labour coupled with the non-diegetic music and the rising beat of the drum added to the intensity of

their experience. Augusta wrote that she felt Bella's pain "with her bones breaking and *no anaesthesia!*" The scene allowed Tami to imagine what it must be like to give birth as she described in the interview:

I think every pregnant mother, the pain they go through... like, I want to give up but I cannot. I need to push through and everything. And then, you can choose not to have the baby, but you want it and choose to go through all the pain. Yeah, that's the pain, and your body is breaking ... I think the movie showed it like she was suffering, and she was so skinny and everything. But it's the pain that every mother goes through. Usually, I find injections so painful, I don't think I want to give birth. Scary. I think of what I have to go through.

The birth scene prompted similar responses from the participants, that they found the scene bloody and scary. Presley wrote: "I did cringe a little as the camera angle did alternate and show it to us from Bella's POV." Frey said:

Yeah, right, they slit... that was very gross. And cringe-y... When it's inside of her, it feels like a part of her. Then, when it's trying to get out, and you need to force it out, it just feels very unnatural. Like a violation of the body kind of feeling.

Buena explained: "When foetus was being taken out, it was hard to watch her being cut open especially knowing it was without anaesthetic. Transformation process was easier to watch." For Agnes though, the feeling of entrapment registered strongly for her in the transformation scene. She said: "Very grotesque and I was trying to shield my eyes from it. The part where she was feeling pain yet can't express it was very frustrating and emotionally draining for me."

For Frey, the seemingly futile attempts by Edward (Figure 21.3) to save Bella contributed to her enjoyment of the film. She exclaimed:

Oh yeah, it's his desperation to revive her. I think that part is memorable because it's sheer desperation for her to breathe. Like he cannot accept that she's dead. That kind of feeling. It feels kind of touching. Not to the point where I'll cry or anything. It just feels like... Awww, you know.... That's something you want ... Like, devotion.

Resuscitation

Figure 21.3: The resuscitation

The sequence of the resuscitation put pressure on me to participate directly in Bella's pain. It is her pain that I experienced through my lived body as my own and the resistance to the projected perception, as seen through the POVs of Edward and Jacob, because my "bodily space/projected space...echoe[d] the different situations" of both my body and the film's, such that I could immediately absorb the implications (Sobchack, *Address of the Eye* 179). The strength of this sequence in evoking a bodily response lies in the evaluative framework

for the viewers to assess their attitudes regarding moral choice. The medium close-ups of Edward and Jacob's frenzied efforts to revive Bella gesture us towards the pro-life and pro-choice debates without projecting in favour of either, precisely because Bella encompass both perspectives. However, this is foreshadowed by the prior heated exchanges between Edward and Bella when they discover the pregnancy. He is given "no choice" as he claims. I admit I was prejudiced to accept his utilitarian view as nobody knew then whether the foetus is a human or a thing. Recall their moral positions on the eve of the wedding. Here, the standpoints are reversed.

The death of Bella means Edward is condemned to a life without her and as Jacob describes, the foetus is a "live-sucking monster." For Bella, having the baby is not a "choice" but "a necessity." One can surmise here that focusing on the consequences is flawed if the pregnancy was terminated. In the birth sequence, although the subjective shot is of Bella, the camera is cautious to render the pro-choice decision ethically ambiguous due to the close-up of the baby (which looks human) and of Bella's fleeting smile before she dies. In other words, the film is engaging us to reflect on the moral decisions in the film; that is, which decision is morally right? To quote Stadler, my viewing body and the film body became a "composite entity within the collaborative effort that constitutes the film," not irreducible to a single subjectivity (44). Bella's suffering also throws into sharp relief ethically fraught interconnections between the characters and the audience on moral choices, decisions, and consequences.

The horror and revulsion during Bella's pregnancy also foregrounds the transformation scene. Bella's corpse becomes a sign "that no longer has the iconic power to intentionally signify as lived." (Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* 236). The birth and transformative sequences also undermine the cultural discourse we have between birth and death. It is in Bella's human death that she is reborn as a 'new' immortal while Renesmee's

birth signals the end of Bella's 'old' body, and her life. As Sobchack asserts, they are both the "liminal moments of bodily transformation" (*Carnal Thoughts* 233). Towards the end of the transformation scene, there is a semi-subjective sequence in which the film expresses, through a series of pans, from Edward to the rest of the Cullens, and Jacob, that the journey of the 'old' body has been ejected to make space for the 'new'.

When the camera closes in on an extreme close-up of Bella's eyes coupled with the non-diegetic music, I felt an unfathomable emotion rising within me. It was as if I had held my breath throughout, and I, too could let go and move onto the next phase at the end of this dramatic moment. This perhaps describes what Sobchack terms as "address of the eye," which "enables both the spectator and the film to imaginatively reside in each other" (*Address of the Eye* 261).

Most of the participants said the transformation was not as intensely felt as Bella was motionless and not physically shown to be experiencing pain. The film had visual effects for this to show the audience what Bella must be experiencing, of the venom creating burning pathways throughout her body, and finally the icy frost that transforms it into a vampire rebirth. However, her body is still as we see only what is projected on screen as the venom that Edward injects her courses through her veins, for it to work and transform her into a vampire. But these are interspersed with scenes of her screaming in pain which the audience sees but cannot hear. The sequence is filmed from her internal thoughts and emotions as she is still under the effects of the morphine.

After Bella dies, Jacob is inconsolable. However, he goes back into the house intending to harm Renesmee as he perceives she is the cause of Bella's death. As he walks into the room, he sees Rosalie with her back to him holding Renesmee (Figure 22.1) and just at that moment, Rosalie holds Renesmee up, Jacob imprints on her.

Figure 22.1: Imprint in progress

The audience is reminded with Jacob's voice-over about what the process is like and what imprinting means. Through his thoughts, we see Renesmee fully grown (Figure 22.2).

Figure 22.2: Renesmee

The voice-over tells us about the special bond a wolf has with the person imprinted on: “You would do anything, be anything she needs. A friend, a brother, a protector.”

As Jacob speaks, the audience is able to reflect on what they experienced in the film about doing the morally right thing, the spousal obligations and familial bonds that are explored within two moral frameworks, neither of which is wrong. The Quileute work according to rule utilitarianism and the Cullens work within Kantian moral principles and act utilitarianism. The Cullens respect Bella’s autonomy to choose and for not killing what Bella thinks is a human life growing inside her. Jacob abandoning his pack to help Bella and the Cullens, because he can see that this is a real family where members protect each other, gives him a new family through Renesmee. Essentially the film’s dominant moral Kantian codes surrounding spouses and parental responsibilities, family, respecting persons and the autonomy to choose, were found to be associative with the participants’ moral outlook. Although a few had advocated abortion when Bella discovers she is pregnant, going the route of termination would have had consequences for the Cullens, Jacob, Seth, and Bella’s human family. Bella’s successful birth of Renesmee also results in Bella’s own birth in the transformation scene.

Film Experiences

One participant listed *Breaking Dawn* as her least preferred film. Agnes said: “very sian⁸² ... very straight-forward and very exaggerated. Personally, I just don’t like films like that lah.”⁸³ Even though a few participants did not engage fully with the film, the theme of family was a major factor in their positive interactions with the film. As well, they appreciated the film presenting morality on abortion and killing by portraying the two philosophical arguments for them to reflect. Some participants who recognised the

⁸² ‘Sian’ is a Singlish term which means either tired or bored.

⁸³ ‘Lah’ is a Singlish tag at the end of phrases or sentences. In the context of the sentence, it is used to convey finality to the participant’s dislike.

philosophical theories applied their own knowledge with which to reason whether an act is morally wrong or right. The participants were also aligned to the motivations of Jacob and Seth to protect Bella because it is the right thing to do. As the following participants said, these elements contributed to their positive experiences of the film.

Cato: “Heart-warming – two opposing members of different tribe come together to protect the person they love regardless of their social values; believe in doing what is right instead of plainly following.”

Frederick: “The most entertaining film as compared to the other four. Still, was not very fond of the movie.”

Noland: “Touching as werewolves and vampires help Bella.”

Freda: “It was a pleasant experience as we see the union of two people who love each other. A knitted family who is willing to die for Bella, and a successful labour.” For Freda, the film was her most preferred: “I think of the positivity of the movie, and *Breaking Dawn* just wins.”

CHAPTER SIX: Moral Perspectives of Participants

OVERVIEW

This chapter presents the moral perspectives of the 15 participants who took part in the study on the key issues of abortion and infidelity within the moral framework as set out in Chapter One. The moral guiding principles on right moral conduct were evaluated according to Kant and Mill, while those that pertained to moral character were assessed from Aristotelian Virtue Ethics. As explained in Chapter Three, the interview schedule (Appendix I) contained a list of topics and questions that were not asked in the same order for each participant, depending on their responses in preceding questions. Not all questions from the schedule needed to be asked as some of their responses crossed over to other topics listed in the interview schedule (Appendix I). For instance, question 7 on the abortion topic in the schedule asks, ‘what sort of options do you think a woman has if her foetus is defective?’ The response to question 7 was volunteered by some participants when discussing question 2; ‘in your opinion, what do you think is the right thing to do with an unwanted pregnancy?’ Hence, question 7 was not asked. Moreover, responses to some questions in the interview were compiled in the coding results for each film in Chapters Four and Five. On the topic of infidelity in the interview schedule, question 8 asks ‘could you describe which scene/film that may have modified your views on infidelity?’ Responses were listed in the coding results table under ‘modifies perspectives’. Appendices J – L are samples of NVivo codings on abortion, infidelity, and moral education. This chapter is structured according to RQ 4 on the participants’ perspectives on moral issues. Because the interview also asked questions about the film experiences, answers to RQ 3 by the participants are indicated in some instances. As the study was exploratory in nature regarding audience reception to films and their associations with the moral issues in the films, other factors also came up in their discussion

with some of the topics introduced by the participants themselves. The details about the participants are illustrated in Table 8. None of them identified themselves as disadvantaged in terms of socio-economic class. All the participants are Chinese except one Indian as indicated in Table 8. All are undergraduates except one in the Master's and another in the doctoral degree programmes.

Table 8: Participant Details

Name	Age	Gender	Religion	Current Education
Burnette	22	Female	Buddhism	Maritime Studies
Buffy	20	Female	Buddhism	Psychology
Buena	20	Female	Buddhism	Sociology
Tami	22	Female	Taoist	Math
Frey	21	Female	Freethinking	Film Studies
Freda	28	Female	Freethinking	Mass Communication
Frederick	25	Male	Freethinking	Bioengineering
Augusta	22	Female	Agnosticism	English
Agatha	33	Female	Agnosticism	Environmental Life Sciences Engineering
Agnes	22	Female	Agnosticism	English
Athlyn (Indian)	23	Female	Atheism	English
Batista	23	Male	Baptist	Chemical Biology
Cato	24	Male	Catholicism	Mechanical Engineering
Presley	22	Male	Presbyterianism	Sociology
Noland	22	Male	Non-Denominational (Evangelism)	Mechanical Engineering

ABORTION

The participants thought the right to choose abortion was an important factor. Some participants used the accessibility of abortion and the legal framework in Singapore as a standard to support their evaluation on abortion as the appropriate means to terminate a pregnancy. They also felt that abortion seems to be more common in Singapore than giving up a child for adoption as their peers and family have been through the abortion procedure. Family members who had opted not to abort had no influence on one participant's pro-abortion view; while for another, it reinforced her anti-abortion stance. The participants also cited the films in the study as means of informing their perspectives on abortion. The responses in this section regarding the participants' perspectives on abortion also relate to question 3 under the topic 'abortion' in the interview schedule (Appendix I), 'from the films you have watched, whose abortion do you think is an acceptable solution?' and question 9 'what do you suppose could be done if a foetus has the potential to harm others in future?'

In this section, I have included topics in the sub-categories that emerged during the interviews. One female participant (Agnostic) was reluctant to give a definitive answer on her moral perspective even when presented with hypothetical situations as she has not experienced those situations. She stated abortion is wrong when the foetus is "forming" and by the sixth month of pregnancy, she considers the foetus "a person" which would make abortion morally wrong for her. Hence, her moral perspective on abortion was not coded.

Utilitarian Outlook

Profiles of participants: Agnostic female 2; Atheist female 1; Baptist male 1; Buddhist female 1; Freethinker 1 female/1 male; Presbyterian male 1; Taoist female 1.

There were nine participants who agreed with abortion on utilitarian grounds. Act Utilitarianism considers the action as morally acceptable based on whether the consequences for the general happiness are at least equivalent for the moral agent and the act is based on the best possible consequence, in this instance, for the mother of the foetus. The reasons given by the participants for abortion pertain mostly to economic ones. The participants therefore believe that having children instead of aborting would result in a worse outcome than abortion because it would be a drain on the parent/family financial resources and the child would be worse off being born if there were not enough resources to sustain the child. Of these, two considered adoptions as an alternative to abortion as well.

The emotional stability of the mother was a consideration for two female participants and the age of the mother was a factor for one participant.

All the participants did not consider foetuses with Down syndrome as sufficient grounds to terminate a pregnancy. But as Presley reasoned, even though children with Down syndrome could have a good quality of life, he advocates abortion because “I don’t know if I’m patient enough and selfless enough to dedicate my life to make sure that my unborn child would have the best life.” His following remark indicated a lack of support as a possible element. He added:

You know, in America, people will say, oh no, don’t abort. Just put it up for adoption. At some point in time, the person who says I’m pro-life, are you really pro-life or are you anti-abortion? Because in the end, if this struggling mother does give birth to the baby, and she really tries very hard to maintain it, educate it ... I’m willing to bet that the person who shouted don’t abort ... wouldn’t be willing to help.

Two participants considered the mother’s life to be more important when deciding whether to abort in situations where a mother’s life is in jeopardy. However, Batista said the termination should not proceed if it endangers the life of the mother.

Citing one film in the study as adding to her perspective, Freda said previously her view on abortion was either to abort or carry the foetus to term but *Cider House Rules* had given her ideas about the different contexts to ruminate before deciding carefully whether to abort. Thus, she will ask more probing questions of others who intend to have an abortion.

Of the least acceptable reason for an abortion, Agnes cites April in *Revolutionary Road* because she “did it to herself” which suggests the act is irresponsible even on utilitarian grounds because the consequence resulted in hemorrhaging and death for April. For the most acceptable reason to abort, Agnes and Freda said the Rose abortion in *Cider House Rules* was a good reason because it was due to the non-consensual nature. In this situation, according to Mill as stated in Chapter One, the Greatest Happiness Principle holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, and wrong if the act causes pain, hence, the individual (Rose) would be the best judge of whether aborting the foetus conceived through rape and incest is better for her. By aborting the foetus, according to the utilitarian theory would be morally permissible. In other words, the participants concurred with the abortion as the best possible outcome. Freda also cited Candy’s abortion as acceptable because there was consent to abort between Candy and Wally. Presley clarified that early abortions were more favourable so he considered April’s abortion at 12 weeks as being more acceptable. On the abortions in *Cider House Rules*, he could not classify which one “is more palatable” as both Rose and Candy had different reasons “but it was also early, so go for it.”

Kantian Perspectives

Profiles of participants: 1 Catholic; 1 Evangelist; 2 Buddhist females; 1 Freethinker female.

There were five dissents to abortion. The participants said they do not agree with abortion except when necessary to save a mother’s life. They also felt that women should be permitted to decide whether they want an abortion or not.

Buffy claimed that after watching the films, coupled with her fear of surgical procedures, all the more she will not have abortions. She added that the films “just reinforced my feeling that we should try and avoid abortion. If I’m not ready for it, then I shouldn’t get into such a relationship with others.” Buffy thought it better for someone to terminate a pregnancy if the child is unwanted as it would bring better outcomes for everyone, for instance, being subjected to poor treatment by the parents later is worse than “dying a quick death” rather like being subjected to “slow torture.” However, personally she would not go through an abortion as she thinks “killing a life is worse.” Thus, her perspective is coded under Kant as she believes she will not abort because of her pro-life stance, although she has no objection to other peoples’ decision to abort.

Citing the example in *Breaking Dawn*, Cato will encourage abortion if the foetus harms the mother: “because my love for the wife is stronger than the baby ... the baby is killing my wife. So, from my point of view, I want to get rid of something that is harming my wife”. He added another reason for abortion was that foetuses with rare genetic defects will suffer and likely be “on life support forever” so they will “very expensive” to sustain as well.⁸⁴ Part of his reasoning is utilitarian because of the financial cost. Being a Catholic, he explained, “there are certain scenarios where the church will allow it, when the baby is causing harm to the mother,⁸⁵ [and according to him] if it’s a case of rape.”⁸⁶ He conceded that given a choice he “would not want to abort a baby because after all, it’s still a life.” This is essentially his view on abortion; hence he is coded with a Kantian perspective and not under Aristotle.

⁸⁴ In *Politics*, Aristotle briefly talks about letting deformed children die and advocates abortion as a means of population control: “let there be a law that no deformed child shall live, couples have children in excess, let abortion be procured before sense and life have begun; what may or may not be lawfully done in these cases depends on the question of life and sensation.” Aristotle gives no indication what he means by “sense and life have begun” or at which stage of the pregnancy we can consider abortion to be morally right.

⁸⁵ The Doctrine of Double Effect may apply if the intent that while saving the mother one unintentionally harms the child. See Woodward, P. *Doctrine of Double Effect*.

⁸⁶ Catholic doctrine does not permit abortion in cases of rape. See Snodgrass, A. *Abortion*.

The other participants were against abortion because it is killing human life. For instance, Frey is a Freethinker who does not want to consider an abortion for herself. Her maternal grandmother had an abortion and had asked her mother to abort Frey as well.

Buffy and Noland both cite Candy's abortion in *Cider House Rules* as "not valid" and something which could be "prevented."

Who should decide?

This section relates to question five under the topic for abortion in the interview schedule (Appendix I). When asked who should be consulted for a decision on whether to terminate the pregnancy, one male suggested that the father might be consulted. Three female participants said both parents should make the decision and the rest said only the mother should decide because she has a right to her own body.

Cells, Foetus, or Baby?

This section relates to question 1 under the topic for abortion in the schedule (Appendix I) which asks 'At what stage of a pregnancy would you classify as the beginning of human life?' Some defined the foetus as "a ball of cells", not "an actual life form" with no "consciousness" and that the "potential of a human being" does not count. It was found if the participants knew when a foetus is classified as human, it may enable them to make a more informed decision on whether to abort or choose other alternatives. Also, the definition of when a foetus is considered human mattered to the participants when deciding on whether the act is morally right, although one participant said after the foetus passes the zygote period means abortion is killing a life. Others measured the permissibility of the act by certain time frames ranging from when a "heartbeat is detected", to "12 weeks when sentience is formed",

to when the “shape of the foetus” or “human form” is apparent. Thus, if they wanted to abort, they would terminate before the time frame. For example, Agatha considered six months as the cut off period because she thinks that is when the foetus is human. From her reflection below, six months would be the time a foetus responds, hence that would be morally wrong for anyone to terminate it. She is currently cohabiting with a woman partner and may consider having children later.

Agatha: It’s difficult. What is the legal definition? Like, two-thirds of the way or something? That one’s based on science. In my view, it’s somewhere in the middle of the pregnancy. Closer to six months.

I: When it’s fully formed?

Agatha: When it responds.

Athlyn said she will abort no matter how far long into the pregnancy if she does not want children. Presley said even at eight months, if a mother wants an abortion, he would encourage her to do so if she has good reasons for it. However, a few advised that just because abortion is legal in Singapore, one should not abuse that right.

Abortion vs Adoption

Adoption was a theme that emerged during one of the first few interviews. Hence, it was explored with only 10 participants, eight of whom said adoption is a good idea but they had reservations about it. Among them were concerns for the future of the adopted child, whether s/he might be subjected to ill-treatment from the adoptive parents and if the child feels unwanted when s/he finds out she was adopted. One felt there might still be an emotional connection to the child by the birth mother if it was given up for adoption as opposed to aborting it at the outset. Athlyn said:

adoption is an option but then, you still have to live with the fact that you've brought someone into the world, and they're yours, and that person is somewhere else in the world. It will still feel like it's...it's your responsibility in some way and you can never be guaranteed that that child will be adopted, or you cannot guarantee that the family that adopts them will treat them well. You can't guarantee their quality of life basically.

One participant cited the *Cider House Rules* as an example of ill-treatment with Homer's second adoption where the parents physically abused him.

Batista argued that adoption might contribute to the problem of unwanted children instead of it being a means to the solution as "there are still more orphans than people who want to adopt." His thoughts echoed Presley who added that a child with disability has an even lower chance of being adopted.

One participant considered adoption as helping couples who are unable to conceive and views it as a positive solution to not terminating potential life. One who is for abortion said she may not be able to give up the baby for adoption if she decides to go ahead with the pregnancy.

Prevention or Termination?

This question was added to subsequent interviews when the first participant cited an example of sterilisation as a preventive to pregnancy. Hence, all 15 participants were asked their opinions.

Abstinence

Seven participants, four of whom were males, chose abstinence as the first choice for birth control as it is the easier method. One female said it is her family tradition to abstain before marriage. However, one participant contends it may be difficult to prevent a

pregnancy with this method in cases of non-consensual sex even if one wants to preserve one's chastity. Noland thinks abstinence is "not impossible. Just need to have pretty good self-control."

Sterilisation

This was the preferred method for birth control for most participants and an alternative to abortion for them. Cato wants children and he thinks sterilization is a form of contraception, which is also against religious teachings. Hence, he is the only dissenting voice on the method. The other 14 participants were agreeable to this method with the caveat that one is definite about not having children in future. In the interview on this theme, Buffy remarked that April in *Revolutionary Road* should have undergone the procedure instead of having to terminate the pregnancy. All the participants concurred that it is a personal decision between couples.

Although Buena is agreeable, she said her family might have objections to the procedure. Two male participants said they do not mind being sterilised instead of the female undergoing the procedure.

Burnette reasoned that if it is the best way to avoid abortion then she is agreeable: "the sterilization is a future probability that you're taking away, but abortion is taking away something that is already there." Hence, for her, sterilization would be the better solution. However, she stressed that sterilisation should be not be a forced means of birth control. She explained:

Okay, that day I was doing a research study about how Indian men are all being captured and put into a camp to fight the population issue in India. When I read that article, I remember thinking like, OMG, how can they do this? It's not even voluntary. They didn't even know what was being done to them, so I don't think it's fair to them. Maybe they have two kids and they

might want to have more, but what business does the government have to tell them not to?

Contraception

This form of birth control was suggested by some as a first option to take. Condoms and pills were the methods they said could be used and one male suggested vasectomy which might be reversible. One female suggested that to avoid abortion at all costs, one could use double protection as these forms of birth control were not failsafe. The morning after pill was mulled over by two females but they said it was after the sexual act so they did not consider it as contraception.

PERCEPTIONS OF DOCTOR'S DUTY

The participants were asked their perception of what a doctor's duty entails regarding euthanasia, the terminally ill and comatose (pregnant) patients. While discussing abortion, a participant had brought up euthanasia as a comparison to terminating the foetus. From that thread of conversation, the question on a doctor's duty arose. Thus, for subsequent interviews, a thought experiment was introduced to incorporate a doctor's duty in attending to comatose patients.⁸⁷ This was explored in depth with participants who said the mother has rights over the foetus; with some saying a doctor's duty is to preserve life. The thought experiment took an interactive aspect as the participants asked questions such as how far long into the pregnancy, would the baby survive the early delivery, or is there a cure for the mother? It was an impromptu experiment as sketched out below.

⁸⁷ I am not making the claim that this is a thought experiment, but most participants pointed out that the scenario I outlined to them was a thought experiment according to their understanding. For definitions and examples of thought experiments see Brown and Fehige, *Thought Experiment*.

Thought Experiment

A visibly pregnant Jane Doe arrives in hospital after a car accident and is declared comatose by the doctors.⁸⁸ The hospital is unable to find any identification on her so no next-of-kin can be contacted. The problem is after a few days, the doctor found out they need to deliver the baby as it could not be sustained due to the medical condition of the mother. The doctors are keeping the mother stable for the present. If they wait, the foetus may not survive. The mother could possibly die as a result of the caesarean in her weakened state. What should the doctor do?

The purpose of asking the above was to find out if the participants' responses were contradictory or similar to the responses for the classification of the foetus and the women's right to abort. As well, this was to probe deeper into their perceptions of a doctor's role from their statements regarding Dr Larch's actions in *Cider House Rules*. Further, the situation has similarities to Bella's pregnancy in *Breaking Dawn*, except Bella made a conscious choice to birth the baby even though she most certainly will die as a result. In the Jane Doe experiment above, the woman could not give consent to abort and neither could she consent to a DNR (do not resuscitate).

With the above scenario, participants differed in their assessments. The main concern was they felt a doctor should abide by the code of ethics and also consent was important to them. Burnette argued that:

I mean in the medical world if I'm not wrong, you cannot do anything without anybody's consent, right? Is it? By right, they're supposed to save lives ... I would still think because it's not the doctor's choice to make, he should just follow his code of ethics, and if that's what his code of ethics says, he should

⁸⁸ Some participants queried about the comatose state, so the thought experiment varied. With some I used the term vegetative state, which is a more permanent condition. Medically, a person in a coma may progress to a vegetative state and/or minimally conscious state (MCS), especially with conditions of severe brain trauma or with hypoxic brain injuries. The two conditions could be applicable to the pregnant patient who was in the accident. In MCS, the patient may involuntarily respond to some stimuli but their eyes are shut and they are not able to communicate. The brain stem is still functioning. However, a patient in MCS can recover albeit with impaired executive functions depending on the extent of the brain injuries.

just follow it ... Yeah, then he has to decide which has the better chance then, cos he doesn't have a choice cos that's not his right. But he has a code of ethics to follow, so that's the one he has to follow.

The tension for some participants was whose life should the doctor save? Participant Cato who had earlier said the mother's life was more important suggested the doctor to abort the foetus, while Noland who is anti-abortion also suggested the mother be saved first if she has a chance to recover, otherwise the baby should be saved if there is nothing medically wrong with it and has a chance of survival. They understood from the Hippocratic Oath that a doctor's duty is to save lives but all said the oath does not apply to abortions. In other words, they do not equate a doctor performing abortions as killing but looked at the situation in the thought experiment as saving a human life which is the mother's.

Euthanasia

Athlyn explained that the doctor could help a dementia person end his/her life. She rationalised that by saving the patient from a lot of pain, euthanasia is "another way of saving his life." Her perspective of euthanasia came from experiencing it through the films she watched.

Athlyn: Actually, for me, I think that dementia is one of the scariest things that people can have because I feel that a person's identity is really connected to their memory, and if that's gone, they lose all their sense of self. And whatever that's occurring around them doesn't mean anything anymore because you can't store memories any more, or you can't register really what's happening.

I: Do you know of someone like that?

Athlyn: No, not personally. Like, seen in movies or shows. I just find it to be a very unpleasant way to live, so I think in that case, euthanasia should be done.

Athlyn added that if she is above 60 years of age she “would like to be euthanized” if the dementia “was very bad” but if she is younger, around 40 years old she would choose to live.

Presley said dementia is open to a discussion between what the patient and family want especially if the patient is suffering. However, he would say to the patient if he was the doctor: “I cannot do it here because in Singapore it’s wrong. Maybe, go to Norway or something?”

Augusta said euthanasia is a choice for the patient to decide assuming he is in the “right mind.” However, if a person is unconscious, the family needs to be consulted as they will need help to support the person, so in this case, euthanasia is an option for the family to decide. The doctor does not factor in her argument for euthanasia.

Batista equated euthanasia with suicide so whether the person or doctor does the act makes no difference. Moreover, he said: “Let’s say you don’t allow doctors to perform euthanasia, right? It might just create some other occupation, like a euthanasia expert who does not take an oath.” But he did not agree with euthanasia for the reason that it would cause pain to others:

I mean, although you are terminally ill, you cannot disagree that there will be a slight, that there is still a glimmer of hope, miracle, chance or whatever you call it. If everyone who is terminally ill goes through this euthanasia, then there’s no more hope And I feel this glimmer of hope thing is actually more important than the act of euthanasia itself. Cos if you kill the act of hope, then it gives a lot of people like, no meaning to life, or something to look forward to. Where there’s no possibility, there’s no more motivation to continue living, continue working.

Batista’s reflection about euthanasia stems from his experience of incarceration at a military prison for marijuana use. He said while waiting in prison for sentencing, it was difficult

because there was no hope to look forward to as there was no date set on when he would be free. Thus, for him, euthanasia is an end to any hope for the family of the terminally ill because if the person does not end his life, there is still hope for his loved ones s/he might recover.

The participants here who were coded to have a utilitarian outlook for euthanasia also had the same outlook for abortion. Objections to euthanasia were from those who equated it with “active killing” and according to the rest of the participants, it is not a case for the doctors to decide. Morally, for them, euthanasia means taking a life.

INFIDELITY

None of the participants interviewed are married. A participant is having her marriage arranged by her mother who is from India and whose own marriage was also arranged with a Singaporean Indian. One is cohabiting with a partner and only two females and one male were currently in a relationship at the time of this study. One just started her first relationship, four days prior to the interview. Another admitted she has not dated before. A male participant said his parents disapprove of dating until he graduates from university and another male said his father discourages him from having one. None of the participants have encountered infidelity in their own personal relationships but have heard or seen their peers or family involved in infidelity.

This topic also includes responses to question 7 in the interview schedule on which character's faithfulness meets their expectations. Responses range from Newland in *Age of Innocence*, Michael (Francesca's son) in *Bridges of Madison County* and Edward in *Breaking Dawn*. Participants mostly did not consider Edward because he was not tested on his faithfulness.

Why is it so wrong?

All the participants regarded infidelity as morally wrong. It was found that divorce is not the first option for the participants in cases of unfaithfulness. There was one participant who considered the consequences of infidelity as a measurement that infidelity is morally wrong. 14 considered it wrong because it was disrespectful to the person being cheated on. Frey said: “Basically, we all just want like, exclusivity.” Noland thought that “the worse one is the one that makes the most changes in the person’s life,” while Athlyn said being unfaithful is wrong but will not break a relationship unless it’s “serial cheating.” Presley said if there was already a separation between spouses or divorce is imminent, then they could pursue an open relationship with others if there is mutual consent, until the divorce. Some equated emotional cheating with physical cheating with the former being the worse form for some. The duration of the relationship also had a bearing on their assessments of the act. Some participants thought that if it is a one-time encounter, they should take steps to ensure it does not happen again. For Frederick, infidelity itself is wrong, based on the undesirable outcome. Hence, 14 participants view cheating according to Kantian principles while one has a utilitarian outlook.

Tami said infidelity is not “morally right” especially if she is married and she has invested time and effort on the family, which she considers a “sacrifice”. If her husband cheated, she would feel betrayed. Besides that, she claimed that even if both do not love each other anymore, both parties must not cheat. When asked to explain her response to *Bridges of Madison County* where she wrote that an extramarital affair was a “beautiful regret,” she explained that her initial thoughts on them came from news broadcasts that tend to portray affairs as “dirty.” Her comment below refers to Chinese newspapers in Singapore who report or sometimes sensationalise affairs of married Singaporean men with women from China or

Vietnam. The women attach to men in the hopes that they might be left money from the CPF (Central Provident Fund) by the men, according to what she reads from the media.⁸⁹

I: Then, you say the affair can be a beautiful regret to live because prior to the film, you thought an affair was something dirty.

Tami: Because I always think it's with some China or Vietnam woman, then will cheat the money, this kind, right? As in I didn't know... maybe the movie portrayed it like ... (awe stricken) phwoar!

I: Something that you want... (laughs)

Tami: Something I really want, something like that. Not like, in the news and all the gossip newspapers, Wanbao they will have cheat CPF and this kind of ... (laughs)

She responded on further questioning that if she cheated on her husband, she would feel “guilty” but she “won't leave” her husband.

Freda said: “Cheating is cheating. Not even talking about married. Even if you're in a relationship, yeah. I don't think you should even be holding hands.” Her reference to handholding is when one is in a relationship; one should not even be touching another person of the opposite gender. On perspectives between physical and emotional cheating, Frey said the latter is worse for her: “For example, if somebody cheated on the spur of the moment but they don't love the person, it was just a spur-of-the-moment thing, I will be angry but the hurt wouldn't be as bad as emotional cheating.” However, Cato thought different:

most of the time when we are faced with temptations ... Our imagination would tend to run wild but whether we put it into action is another thing.

Getting caught is a whole different story itself. For me, I think you're entitled to think of whatever you want as long as you don't put it into action.

⁸⁹ The CPF is the Central Provident Fund in Singapore which is a form of superannuation. Money is contributed to this fund once a person starts work in Singapore. It can be withdrawn periodically when one retires depending on one's eligibility and the amount of the money one has set aside for retirement. It is a compulsory scheme run by the government.

He added that it is “the act of cheating itself, not the fear of getting caught,” that is the deterrent. Like Cato, Frederick does not equate thinking about cheating as the same as the act.

I: So, thinking about cheating and actually cheating, is there a difference for you?

Frederick: I think there is. Thinking of cheating is like a temptation. Temptation I think is always there because after all, we are humans, so the temptation is always there; it's up to you to decide whether you want to take the step. Go ahead and cheat or not? Imagine ah, haven't done anything?

I: But you wish whatever you're doing with your partner now is that other person.

Frederick: The definition of cheating is not what most people would define lah, but it's the same, you're cheating yourself. Not just marriage I think. For relationship also lah.

I: Same?

Frederick: Same. Should be the same.

Thoughts on Marriage

The topic on marriage was understood by the participants as between heterosexual partners. For participant Agatha, who prefers to label herself as “queer,” she understood it to be a legal union between partners of the same gender. The question on the meaning of marriage was posed to find out the relationship between marriage and infidelity and what marriage means to the participants. Most of them thought marriage is hard work and efforts should be made to maintain the relationship before the marriage is exposed to infidelity. If a

partner in a marriage has been unfaithful, Burnette says “I think I will still stay with the existing person that I already made a promise - a social contract - with.” 14 participants thought marriage is “based on trust,” “a commitment,” and a “contract” between two parties who mutually agree to be together. However, Agatha, who labels herself as “queer” called it “a ridiculous social thing that people made up” and a “very silly institution.” The other participants’ thoughts on marriage were about making the effort to rectify things when it is not working while Agnes says marriages “don’t last.” One participant suggested ways of keeping the marriage interesting particularly when there are children who might occupy a couple’s time exclusively. His resources on relationship are usually obtained from reading American publications online about dating and relationships. But he adapts them to the Singaporean contexts. On making a marriage work to avoid the trap of infidelity, he said:

It doesn’t hurt to just show tokens of appreciation every other day. You set a date night for every week, that kind of thing ... it’s important to portion off part of our schedule just to re-ignite your love again. If not, the relationship will definitely go wrong. Your marriage will become very stagnant ... it’s always a lot of hard work. It’s not like... so what if you love each other, you know. There’s bound to be days when you hate... when you quarrel and you just want to walk out but you choose to stay and fight because you love that person. That kind of thing. So, it is actually hard work to preserve that... after seeing this for like, 10 years, I may get sick of that person, or sometimes, you know how they say, the flame dies.

Athlyn has a different perspective. At the time of the study, her mother is arranging Athlyn’s marriage, which she is ignoring in favour of finishing her tertiary education:

I guess I’ve seen a lot of struggle in my parents’ marriage, and in my extended family... their marriages. I think that growing up, you watch

movies and marriage is portrayed very idealistically. But in reality, I can't speak for other people's experiences, but from what I've seen I definitely feel that marriage is not a smooth journey, and not something I aspire towards. Like, I've seen it cause so much pain to the people that I'm around, so it's definitely not the happy image that people think it is.

In reference to the struggle of her parents' marriage, she said that they were on the verge of divorce because there were accusations of her dad's infidelity. But Athlyn said there was no proof even though divorce papers had been drawn up. At the time of the study, she said the divorce plans were shelved.

Frederick, whose father had an affair long ago said the family is still living with the strain many years later. But the parents did not divorce so his perspective of marriage is derived from his familial background: "All this while, I have this perspective whereby if you are in a marriage, then you have to stay in your marriage regardless of the situation." He added that if it was an abusive relationship, then marriage should be discontinued.

The participants thought Edward and Bella in *Breaking Dawn*; Francesca in *Bridges of Madison County*; May in *Age of Innocence*, and Frank in *Revolutionary Road* most fulfilled their spousal obligations.

Does the Truth Matter?

This section relates to the topic 'promises/lying' in the interview schedule. Keeping promises was very important to three participants. For two participants, breaking promises would be appropriate "when doing so will bring less hurt to the other person" (Frey) while Noland said if breaking it "would bring more benefit" to both persons. Some participants also equated lying with breaking promises and some distinguished between which types of lies were morally acceptable than others. Keeping the truth from someone was regarded as similar to lying. Burnette said "deceiving is definitely wrong. You're not giving the person the

choice...holding back the truth is not the same as lying. Lying is manipulating the truth.” Freda said “white lies are acceptable if it’s out of good intention.” The characters that participants thought keep their promises were mixed. They ranged from Edward, Esme, and Bella in *Breaking Dawn* to Francesca and Michael (Francesca’s son) in *Bridges of Madison County* who keep promises to stay with the family; May and Newland in *Age of Innocence*, and Jacob in *Breaking Dawn* who says he will protect Bella from the wolves.

PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS

Most of the participants have positive family relationships with either or both parent(s). Only one participant has a parent who is divorced. The participants share varying degrees of closeness with their parents. For those whose families have an emotionally distant or frequently absent parent, the participants are generally appreciative of the other parent in providing for the household. They understood that the parents have made great “personal sacrifice” to provide for them “emotionally and financially” and some consider themselves fortunate to have parents who have provided them with a stable household. None of the participants were considered rich in terms of economic status. Their parents come from a variety of occupational backgrounds. Some participants idealise motherhood and one participant views his parents as “superheroes” (Presley). Participants thought the characters who most fulfilled their parental duties were Francesca in *Bridges of Madison County*, Newland and Bella in *Breaking Dawn*, and Dr Larch in *Cider House Rules*.

Incest

The issue of incest came about in the interviews when I checked the film questionnaires for the responses to the *Cider House Rules*. On the whole, the participants thought that incest is morally wrong. Some said if it is a consensual relationship between

siblings or cousins, it is permissible. A few had the idea that it is at least permissible according to what they watch in other media. For one participant, the idea that it is permissible came from a text in her Literature course; *The God of Small Things*, about incest between twins. Another watched it on the TV series, *Game of Thrones*, while one watches Japanese anime where incest is a common theme. Freda is “on the fence” about it. She explained: “I feel if you can accept same sex marriage, if you can accept any other kind of unpopular relationship ... if you advocate you have the freedom to love, love wins, then what is wrong about father and daughter?” However, in this case, she said the child must be of a consensual age. But, when posed the question of living in the same house, for instance, if her daughter has a relationship with Freda’s husband, Freda says “it’s very hard to accept ... because of the incest.” For others, incest is wrong based on religious grounds: “It’s like a religious kind of ethos, it’s wrong” (Noland). Tami gave an example of why she cannot accept the idea of a mother and son’s incestuous relationship.

Tami: Uhhh, as in this snapchat app, like this new app I access daily for the stuff. There’s quite often in the U.S. this incest thing. The guy, as in, I still cannot accept this thing...

I: It’s real?

Tami: I don’t know if it’s real but it’s quite often that this kind of incest thing will come up in snapchat. I think the mother gave up her child for adoption, and then they met each other lah.

I: The mother and the child?

Tami: Yeah, and then I think they both fell in love. Like the son fell in love with the mother. Then, I was like, haaah?.... Waaaa! They said that the family was accepting. I was like what? I don’t know lah but I cannot accept. I think it’s a bit disgusting.

Tami: (cont'd) I can't remember if the mother was married, with children or not. If she had a family, it's even worse. My mother is dating my brother ... (disbelieving laugh)... I don't think people will accept this kind. It's against the law I think.

The second section answers RQ4a: How do the participants associate/disassociate with each other, in making sense of the moral issues?

(DIS)ASSOCIATIONS WITH RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

Participants who had Kantian leanings towards abortion cite their religious affiliations at times to support their moral perspective on abortion. Cato, the Catholic male, cited his religious background as a factor in considering whether abortion is morally wrong and when it might be permissible from his understanding of religious teachings. Although his family is deeply religious and he receives daily religious messages from his mother, he has curtailed his church activities due to his university workload. Noland, the Christian male however, said his religious teachings do not emphasise whether the action is right or wrong, although he attends religious meetings regularly. He understood abortion to be wrong, based on what the pastor preaches. The Buddhists: Burnette, Buffy, and Buena all stated there is no formal teaching on abortion but Burnette did relate the idea of abortion to possible "karma" in Buddhist teachings so it is an additional deterrent for her. For Frey, a Freethinker, her own family background contributed to her anti-abortion stance. Those who advocated abortion on utilitarian grounds claimed they had no religious teachings to guide them on their perspectives. Both males: Presley, Presbyterian and Batista, Baptist, said they do not attend church anymore and had declared their religious affiliations based solely on their past attendances at church. As well, some participants from the No religion category also come from family backgrounds that are either Buddhist or Taoist, but the participants have

converted or relinquished their past religious affiliations. As an example of the possible influences on a participant's family background, Agatha, who is Agnostic, said her mum is Christian but the family is Taoist.

Agatha: *Um*, my mum has Christian tendencies. I don't know whether she's ever been baptised.

I: Was she a born Christian?

Agatha: No.

I: So, what was she before?

Agatha: Her mum is very traditional, like Hokkien tradition. I don't know if you are familiar with it. Like, they have certain ceremonies during the year.

I: But they have Taoism, is it that one the Goddess of Mercy one? Or ancestral worship?

Agatha: No, no.

I: Buddhist?

Agatha: No. It's its own religion like a cultural, like...

I: Every 1st and 15th of the month you pray kind of thing?

A: Yes, there is that element. Then, there's certain big festivals where you lay out the table for the spirits.

I: Taoism.

Agatha: There are Taoist roots in that but I think a bit more like a thing that evolved on its own. It's like, from that part of China where they're from, and it's the tradition.

The participants in the Buddhism and Taoism categories claimed there are no religious teachings on morally right or wrong actions regarding abortion or infidelity as the religious texts focus on prayers and chants. Most say they go to the temple on certain days of the month to pray but the trips do not hold any significance for them. Some also have altars in their home. Their perspectives are also informed, to a certain extent, by their peers and family backgrounds. As well, Athlyn, an Atheist who comes from a religious Hindu background and decided a few years ago not to participate in the religious ceremonies at the temple, said there are no teachings regarding abortion from Hinduism.

In terms of infidelity, the consensus that it is morally wrong spreads across all religious and non-religious categories. Only Cato, the Catholic male, alluded to it being morally wrong according to his religious teachings. Some of the participants' perspectives also come from the media, their peers, and to a certain extent their extended familial relationships.

From the participants' accounts, religious influences on their moral perspectives are weak. With the exception of Cato, who comes from a religious family background and had attended church regularly, his knowledge of religious teachings regarding infidelity informs his perspective but on abortion in rape cases, his perception is erroneous. Across Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism (as articulated by Athlyn), there are no religious teachings to guide them on morality. Based on the findings, it appears that Berger and Luckmann's account of socialization may be right in the everyday life of these participants, that the "sacred forces" (129) would take a back seat and individuals' actions would become embedded in society.

Influences from their religious backgrounds on their associations and dissociations with the films were weak because most religious categories, except Catholicism, do not have tenets that specifically prohibit abortion or infidelity. Moreover, most of the participants were

also not religiously affiliated to any organized religion. Based on the participants' accounts of what infidelity means to them, it would be closer to the Kantian view of unfaithfulness for infidelity portrayed in the films: *Age of Innocence*, *Bridges of Madison County*, and *Cider House Rules*. For abortion, *Breaking Dawn* and *Cider House Rules* provoked a utilitarian view while *Revolutionary Road* was opened to some criticism regarding the danger to and death of the mother. Candy's actions flouted the ethical principles and the participants largely concurred that the abortion was wrong because it means killing two lives and Candy's reason for aborting was not a good one.

As the participants' responses show, in the consideration of morally right or wrong actions in previous sections on lying, incest, abortion, and infidelity and so on, their perspectives fall within the moral framework as detailed in Chapters One and Three and some of them identified with these as well when discussing their perspectives. Significantly, none of them cited the national 'shared' values outlined in Chapter One as informing their perspectives on morally right and wrong conduct. The next section illustrates that moral education seems inadequate in addressing moral issues.

EDUCATIONAL (DIS)ASSOCIATIONS

The participants come from a variety of educational backgrounds prior to attending university. They come from neighbourhood, independent, or mission schools, both at primary and/or secondary levels. After secondary school, some went to junior colleges and others to the polytechnics. For those in Catholic schools and junior colleges, the participants said there were no religious teachings on abortion or infidelity for them if they were not Catholics. However, some said there was an abortion video which they watched, giving information on how an abortion is done. Their peers in school are from a variety of backgrounds.

Regarding moral education, all participants could not recall any lessons from primary or secondary school. Some recalled vaguely, a civics and moral education course as part of

the curriculum which taught them about not cheating or stealing, while others said most lessons centred on good citizenship, which they do not remember. Moral education was not taught in their junior colleges or polytechnics, although one participant remembered a short course on ethics when he was in the polytechnic, which he found appealing. Currently, two participants said they were taking an online ethics course at NTU, where they were required to read a lesson and answer some questions. One participant thought it was interesting.

SOCIO-CULTURAL

In terms of abortion, it was perceived that society frowns on unwed mothers; hence, abortion would be the appropriate course of action for most of the participants who are not guided by their religious teachings.

Buena: Like, er, right now, it's er... (stumbles)... getting pregnant is not a big of a thing as before.

I: You mean unmarried pregnancy?

Buena: Yeah, unmarried pregnancy. Like, it's not as big a deal, at least in the West I guess. Like, maybe in Singapore. If I ever got pregnant, my mum would kill me I guess ... because now abortion's legal, right, so um, don't just abuse your right to have abortion I guess.

In terms of infidelity, the participants' perception also stems from society's views about it.

I: You said something about another person talking about the person having the affair. So, would people's talk actually prevent you from having an affair?

Buffy: I think yeah to an extent. I feel like if it's not – depends on the character you are – if you are a person who wants people to like you, you want to be likeable to everybody, then it will prevent you from being in this situation.

I: What about you?

Buffy: Me, ah, yeah, I would try not to. Cos I try to please the people around me... Maybe you'll have a secret child, and then... there's this social stigma of having a child out of wedlock, who is not your partner. And then, the partner cares about what other people think, so then he might not accept that lah. And then, he won't accept that child and his wife ... It's something that the society deems undesirable.

I: So, do you believe ... like, do you care about social stigmas in Singapore?

Buffy: I think I do... more than I would like to admit ... No, I don't think it's wrong. It's just that society thinks it's undesirable.

On divorce:

Burnette: I think even in today's modern society, if you were to do that, most probably you'll be an outcast, and people will want to steer away from you.

I: So, respect for social norms is important to you?

Burnette: Yeah. What others think of me is very important to me, so... I think I feel the same – being of use ... to the society, to my family, to be able to contribute some kind of value. That's what I think... I think there are not a lot of moral people left in this world.

Although the research question originally focused on educational, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds of the participants, the topic of media, like the Internet and other films, were also cited by the participants as informing them on their moral perspectives. This was in response to questions one and two and the question on the frequency of watching movies in the first portion of the Interview Guide in Appendix I. The participants said the topics in the study are generally not discussed with their families even though usually when

they are in a predicament, they would turn to their families as a first source of guidance. In this case, they would look to the internet and media for information.

MEDIA IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The participants do not watch any Singaporean produced English language shows. Most of the films they watch are Hollywood films or TV series such as the *House of Cards*. None of the films in this study would be the types they normally watch unless there is some hype surrounding it, like *The Twilight Saga*, when the films were first released.⁹⁰ Also, they like dramas and thrillers and participant Cato usually watches horror films like *Saw* and *Hostel*. Participant Noland likes watching James Bond movies made in the 70s, while participant Batista likes films such as *Captain Fantastic*. The frequency of watching English language films ranged from one to eight times a month for all participants. They would watch films with friends at the cinema or online if watching alone. A few also watch programmes on Channel 8, which is the local Mandarin channel.

Buffy: (whispers) Oh yeah... But adoption, I feel, the next time the child may also feel stressed out when they find out they are adopted. I always see the dramas... the adopted child always ends up ... Yeah

I: So, all this information is from movies?

Buffy: Yeah, dramas.

I: Meaning what kind of dramas?

Buffy: (bashful) Uhh, Channel 8...

I: Chinese dramas? From which country?

Buffy: I usually watch the Singapore Channel 8, 9 pm one.

⁹⁰ Some of the films in the study were released when the participants were in their infancy or adolescence.

I: Which is, Singapore production, or...

Buffy: Yeah, (giggles) MediaCorp.

I: So, the MediaCorp productions you see, the adopted child is always traumatised?

Buffy: Yeah.

I: You don't see happy endings with adoption?

Buffy: Rarely, cos it's a drama (laughs).

Yeah, but I've also seen a lot of TV shows where like, the mum leaves, and the children are like, they either dislike women, or they are emotionally scarred, and they don't want to go near women.

I: What kind of movie?

Buffy: I think it's also a Channel 8 show.

I: So, they tend to show that leaving the family is not a good thing? And you believe that?

Buffy: Yeah.

Buffy also watches "animation, comedy, action, rom-com" and films with "mostly recognised Hollywood stars."

Presley: You always see in Channel 8 dramas all those people who cheat, right; it's always in a moment of lust. That kind of thing, so you always see it in a very bad perspective. You never see, from the cheater's point of view.
(cont'd) No, lah, the drama series.

I: Yeah, drama series, but made in where?

Presley: Singapore.

(cont'd) because you never get to see their perspective of why they cheat.

Presley: And there's another one, quite recent I think. Something called...Amanda...or something. Like a mother gave birth to a baby in a hospital. Then, in the night, someone took the baby away and raised it as her own. And for some reason, the hospital cameras couldn't identify her...

I: That's the African-American, right?

Presley: (sounds thrilled) Yeah, yeah, YEAH!

I: It's a real story, documentary based on a real story?

Presley: Yeah, yeah, almost a documentary, oh my God!

The participants watch a range of genres for various reasons and some older films such as *Rain Man*.

Tami: I like dramas. I watched *Hacksaw Ridge*, the one with Andrew Garfield, the war one.

Tami: (cont'd) Yeah. Then, I watched *La La Land*. Because it won so many awards, but it's a bit too musical. I watched *Rain Man*. I liked that one. More on family, like kinship. Yeah, I like this kind.

Frey: Usually Hollywood productions, but sometimes if a friend recommends something else, I would...

I: Like what?

Frey: Let's say, art film, I would be open to watching it, but somebody has to recommend it to me first.

Frey: (cont'd) I like watching psychological thrillers. Cos I feel like, it's very exciting. But not all the time. I also like to watch comedy. Very dumb shows. Yeah, so extremes.

MORALITY

Moral Qualities

Most participants listed traits they think a moral person possesses such as compassion, respect, humility, filial piety, integrity, intelligence, honesty, kindness, and courage. Some of these traits are Aristotelian virtues and Confucian based ideals. Others include: pragmatism, no harm and no kill policy, don't violate other people's spaces, critical thinking, and living up to one's conscience.

Presley: Like, in the case you marry someone and you're not happy, I expect a morally upright person to tell the partner and discuss how they want to carry on with it. So, if they do end up getting a divorce, I can't say that he's morally upright because he's not loyal but he's still morally upright because he respects his partner enough that to tell them about it.

However, most have a utilitarian outlook:

Athlyn: I think always sticking to his beliefs. So, if you believe something, you won't...you know just because you are afraid to do something, you don't do what you think is right. I think being brave ... and what is the best outcome. So I guess, weighing the consequences to see what is the best outcome.

Buffy: Commitment and to tell right from wrong. And maybe utilitarianism.

On where one gets the idea of morality:

Freda: I think the society has already defined moral for us for example, through the law. You know that okay, killing someone is definitely not right, and you get punishment for that. There are consequences to it. But there are things that are debatable.... So, I think society also helps us to shape... (cont'd) I think through life experiences, through observations, and I think like, some part of upbringing as well. These are all the things that affect what I think is right or wrong. So, how I think is very different from somebody else .. Upbringing, and also education from your school teachers.

Moral Education

Those who were exposed to ethics courses in tertiary education said those were helpful to understanding their own perspectives for certain moral issues.

I: So, in NTU, except for the courses online, do you think, right, some sort of moral education will help people choose the correct action in times of difficulty?

Agnes: Could help, but depends... Because I feel that we are older, we think that we know everything, so we don't really listen to these kinds of courses, so it depends on the level of resistance and how old we are.

I: How old do you think one should begin when one might be receptive?

Agnes: Since young lah. I would say after Sec 1 lah.

I: How important is it do you think that you need that kind of education?

Agnes: (firm) Very. But also got a lot of problems trying to structure it, right? ... In a way, your mind will be broadened lah. You won't be just in your little bubble where nothing ever happens, that kind of thing.

Interview with Augusta:

I: When you came to NTU, did you take any ethics course?

Augusta: The online one, Ethics and Moral Resilience.

I: You finished that course? So, what do you think?

Augusta: (Pause) It's very philosophical. Like, the reasonings are always from philosophy, kind of thing. (Pause) And then, (pause) don't remember much of it...

I: If that was helpful to you, how can a course be made better to help in your reasoning?

Augusta: Present a sort of debate, so like, from another point of view, my stand kind of thing. Then, when you see it, you can consider it better.

I: So, the course was run, like, they just present one side.

Augusta: They just present a situation, and they ask for your opinion kind of thing. They ask you to answer like, MCQ kind, and analyse what you write.

I: So, how would you like this to be shown? Like, this debate to be shown?

Augusta: So, basically, they give you a scenario and you take your stand, and you explain why you think this way. And then, after that, maybe they show you another person's point of view, and someone will take another stand. And there are arguments, and then you give a final conclusion what you think, or like, if you want to argue against it.

I: So, something like the films?

Augusta: Yeah

I: Or a hypothetical situation given like the euthanasia one?

Augusta: (affirmative) Uh mhm

CHAPTER SEVEN: Discussion

This study aimed to answer questions on audience associations with morality in films and how they engage the audience with the purpose of uncovering their moral perspectives about key moral concerns in their lived experiences. The analyses of the films demonstrate that they are an excellent resource for audiences to engage with moral issues in their everyday life and that films can ‘educate’ the audience. The narratives reflect particular philosophical content and moral positions with some participants applying moral theories to the films as part of their deliberations on appropriate moral conduct, watching films and doing philosophy at the same time (Read and Goodenough 31) through an evaluation of the moral orientations offered by the films. In this situation, they were actively using the films to fulfil certain motivations; whether it is to experiment with various solutions to resolve a film character’s predicament or to make judgements on the outcome of characters’ actions. For others, the films depict situations that they had not considered before, surprising their own beliefs about what is morally right or wrong in relation to the proffered solution to resolve the predicaments. I submit that the films must have some moral resonance for the audience before they engage morally with the films. Character empathy as an emotion is fleeting in the moments when viewing an act on screen because of the way the camera switches points of view between characters, unless the story is experienced exclusively from the point of view of a single character. Resonance occurs when there is significant moral content, where the characters engage in a variety of actions to resolve a predicament because it is these acts that allow the audience to adopt an evaluative attitude towards moral decisions and outcomes. These were evident in the emotional and physical resonance from Francesca's character and Bella's childbirth which Stadler, quoting Sobchack, claims shifts the sensory to the “emotive and physical.” This affected the audience from both genders because they signal both “physiological and emotive experience” that connect audience to screen characters (29).

The participants used their constructed identities to respond to the social realities in particular films – their interpretations were not essentialised and reducible to neat categories of class, gender, ethnicity or age although sexual orientation, religious affiliation, education, national, socio-cultural discourses created associations or disassociations with the moral content or characters in specific scenes. But dissociations with filmic elements did not mean outright disengagement either; rather, positive and pleasurable experiences sometimes arose despite these contradictions. In other words, because they have not personally experienced the issues in their lived world, they reimagine the self in interpreting meanings in the films, engaging with morality as they evaluated actions and outcomes. This was particularly evident in their responses to *Bridges of Madison County* and to a certain extent, the *Age of Innocence*.

In these two films, almost all 15 participants were responding to the characters, Francesca in *Bridges of Madison County* and May in *Age of Innocence* as parental figures who were protecting their families from potential separation caused by infidelity. Their worldviews of parental responsibilities and duties to spouse were based on the national discourse of placing the importance of family over individual desires and in their own lived experiences where their parent(s) provide stability in the forms of financial and emotional support. This was especially prevalent for the under 25-year-olds. Where the family dynamics are already threatened in the lived world, participants viewed infidelity as more reprehensible even though their worldview that infidelity is morally wrong was constructed with their own definitions of emotional or physical relationships, including the duration of the affair, prior to watching the films. Hence, divorce was never an option considered by the participants in response to the characters' predicaments especially when children are involved. So they viewed marriage as the ultimate commitment which is unbreakable, except for one participant who is from a subculture whose norms about romantic relationships are at odds with the community and national discourse, that a union must be between two heterosexual partners bound by a legal marriage. The familial discourse was also articulated

in *Breaking Dawn* and *Cider House Rules*, which resonated strongly with the participants. In this sense, the participants were active in creating meanings from the films in reception terms about marriage, commitment, spousal responsibilities, parental obligations and the concept of family ties. As Fisherkeller noted in her own study, the media can become integrated in the audience's lives to shape imagination and identity in experimenting with moral outcomes such that in many ways its use is also a moral question (Alasuutari 11).

In terms of reception to films, Staiger claims that "audience are not ideal readers" ("Film, Reception and Cultural Studies" 89) and audiences make their own decisions about which parts of the films they concentrate on and treat others as "irrelevant" (Barker 125). Indeed, through the analyses of the film, it was challenging to note what the producers intended, what "close readings of texts *assume*" what audiences might do (Bird, 191). As the medium is intended for a single viewing (generally), where the audience attention is focused cannot be predicted in advance because the engagement with the film or association with certain aspects depends on whether the elements resonate for the audience, or at least interest them. With reference to Hall's Encoding and Decoding Model, it is unclear if a disengaged audience is actually 'opposing' a particular reading of the film because they are indifferent to films, or 'resistant' to the marital discourse depicted in the films because of their queer identity for example. In that case, that would apply across all films but having a queer identity did not have a bearing with associating with the films and participants who preferred books to films still found some meanings, associations and/or engagement with certain aspects as the questionnaires and interviews show when they decode the films. This is because the participants found meanings that were immediately relevant to or unacknowledged in their lived experiences and recreated new interpretations for others. In this regard, the participants have the necessary acumen to understand the filmic content even though there is not an obvious fixed reading in the narratives. They allow the audience to

form an evaluative ethical gaze on the moral predicaments and outcomes. One who did not like *Breaking Dawn* because of the vampire trope was highly participatory in weighing the ethical theories of Kant and Mill in his evaluation of killing for the greater good. This was because he used knowledge from his education for an understanding of the moral issue.

Films that contributed to heightened emotions were those focused on dialogue driven narratives with limited characters and associated with great acting such as *Bridges of Madison County* and *Revolutionary Road*. In other words, they found some gratifications with the films because they brought moments of enjoyment and sometimes feelings of anxieties as they identified with the characters and situations. That is not to say they become the characters themselves, rather, they are transposed into the social reality for that brief encounter where they empathise with the predicament, share the pain and loss of Francesca and April, especially when the outcome coheres to their sense of right and wrong conduct.

As Sobchack explains in *The Scene of the Screen*, the cinematic media:

offers our lived-bodies ...different ways of being-in-the world ... implicates us in different structures ... each has a particular affinity with different cultural functions, forms, and contents – each stimulates us through differing modes of representation to different aesthetic responses and ethical responsibilities. (84)

Films that have a range of moral situations like *Cider House Rules* or when it offers two antithetical solutions like *Breaking Dawn* were appealing to the participants because of the opportunities to morally experiment with possible solutions. Even though these films, including *Age of Innocence*, were set in different historical settings, the predicaments act as “possible parallels” to contemporary life (Barker 132).

The participants’ responses to the interviews show they consume films about one to eight times a month, which is over and above the national statistics Ravenscroft et al (216) presented and higher than the MPAA figures for American cinematic audiences for the 18–

39-year-olds as stated in the Introductory Chapter. The study participants also revealed they are regular consumers of American television series. As this study illustrated, a single viewing can alter perspectives about abortion, infidelity, and affected some participants about their previously held notions of marriage being a harmonious domestic state. For a few, it offered alternative solutions to remaining in destructive marital unions or reinforced the belief that marriage is not something to aspire towards. While there is some truth to Morley's claim that "world-wide audiences often interpret "foreign media" ("Unanswered Questions" 105) according to local cultures, the Singaporean audience has also been exposed to long term cultural flows in the import of Hollywood films and a daily stock of American television, such that it has become difficult for some to discern other accented English besides the American one, as shown in the example of a participant who could not understand the 'British' tones of the characters in *Age of Innocence*. As well, the findings also showed that some regularly watch other genres, which have their own inscribed values. A couple of the participants also watch locally produced Chinese films that promote family values and reject adoption as a solution to abortion because of the social stigma attached to unmarried mothers. These regular exposures need not be whole programmes or films but scenes or episodes of television which can have an accumulative effect. As the participants noted, they had been exposed to frequent media portrayals that infidelity is abhorrent but add genuine love into an affair as an antidote to a stale existing marriage presented in *Bridges of Madison County*, the perspective of infidelity alters significantly for some.

This study also offers empirical evidence about the claims that through films, one can be doing philosophy. While I contend that this is possible, articulation of specific ethical theories is challenging because of the required basic knowledge in presenting philosophical arguments in support of particular moral actions. What is evident however is that films can be a moral resource as the participants actively picked out important and relevant concerns that were not asked, such as loyalty and friendship and interpreted them as *moral* issues.

In their everyday life as the findings show in Chapter Six, their acceptance of abortion is based on their socio-cultural contexts, pragmatism, and the national discourse of the legitimacy of sterilisation and abortion as choices for unwanted pregnancies but constrained by religious affiliation for some. When faced with the mediated form of social reality in the films, their associations with abortion increased because of the possible scenarios that were unacknowledged before but which modified their perspectives on advancing the position that termination is morally right. It is important to note that the participants did not delineate between situations on whether abortion is right prior to watching the films. They generally accepted it as such – because abortions occur in their peer and familial interactions. However, the films actually gave them predicaments to think about such that they became more aware of their perspectives, or challenged them to previously held beliefs. One aspect that they thought important to abortion was the status of the foetus, which had a bearing on when abortion might be less acceptable.

This study also found that through an examination of the audience's moral perspectives, certain moral orientations are indicated that point to standards of normative ethics which examines right and wrong moral conduct. Significantly, early moral education was not cited as a resource by the participants in their assessments. Quoting some of the nation's 'Shared Values' in the interviews in response to the question on moral qualities was more a 'rehearsed' recitation. Interestingly, these were also not articulated in response to the films or to moral issues discussed. Instead, those who were exposed to moral principles in tertiary institutions were able to use knowledge from their understandings of the moral principles to evaluate and present their moral positions, and even identify their own moral orientations according to the principles. Further, in regards to their reasoning and perception of the moral issues, they were oriented towards the moral framework as set out in Chapter One.

VALIDITY

I began this study in an inductive manner to explore the moral perspectives of the audience in relation to the moral content in the films. This was to achieve an understanding of what meanings are created through the process of audience interpretations. The methods chosen, and the data, give an account of the structure and meaning within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm with a phenomenological approach to film analyses and a content analysis of the films' moral content and participants' data. They reveal how social phenomena are put together through particular interactions. I selected the texts and interviews "as a strategy that adds rigor, breath, complexity... and depth (Denzin and Lincoln, 5). Throughout the research process, I made 'visible' to the reader a detailed account of the strategy and data analysis with the use of questionnaires and interview data to conduct validity checks on the film experiences and comparing them with the deductive coding frame from which interpretations take place and showing how these produce particular interpretations and exclude others. The participants were also presented extracts of data from their questionnaires as recall cues and counterchecks to answer questions set for the participants (Silverman 365). More importantly, transcribing crucial pauses enabled right interpretive judgements because of subtle features to mark anxieties and emotions about issues deemed important to the participants.

I also recorded and transcribed verbatim accounts of what participants say, rather than reconstructing speech, so as not to influence the reporting categories in the texts and these were also coded in a standardized way. Content analysis, as Morley argues, also helps to unravel scenes in the films which appeal to the audience and where moral content is focused which lends validity to the study ("Unanswered Questions" 110).

Contribution

The results illustrate that the film audience evaluate films in creative ways to interrogate moral predicaments and outcomes from their lived experiences. Thus, the findings offer an empirical aspect to the scholarship on films and philosophy that films act as a moral and cultural resource for them to ruminate on appropriate actions. Although there have been quantitative studies on new media and consumption of Hollywood films in Singapore at the time of research, studies regarding audience reception in relation to moral perspectives on moral content have not been done. Thus, this study complements research on consumption of Hollywood films. This is particularly salient when culture from media products are thought by the government in Singapore to influence its citizens, as the study showed the reception to films set in different historical contexts also has relevance in terms of morality and social issues to that of the contemporary multi-religious audience situated in multi-cultural Singapore. By identifying which moral philosophy is dominant in certain scenes/films in this study and assessing how the audience interprets, associate or disassociate with particular moral actions or outcomes in the films, the results indicated the type of moral principles the audience is aligned with in certain situations. The study showed the participants' moral outlooks in relation to their immediate concerns which are useful for crafting social policies, rather than policy makers consulting solely religious views or the 'Shared Values.' This study also illustrated films are a moral resource which can be introduced in schools for educating individuals on moral standards and how to apply them to difficult, relevant issues in everyday life, as well as improving media literacy rates among its citizens. As well, the study makes a contribution to the vast body of work on audience studies. The participants in this study have demonstrated active viewing practices gathered from a repertoire of knowledge in their everyday life. Yet worldviews may alter or become ingrained when certain images have accumulative influences through daily interactions with the media.

IMPLICATIONS

Contrary to what the statistics on infidelity in Singapore state (as mentioned in the Introduction), divorce is not the avenue the participants would choose in cases of infidelity. Media images can also undermine the existing views on marriage and infidelity by altering perspectives or reinforce existing ones. The utilitarian outlook on abortion, however, is congruent to the high rates of abortion among the graduate population. This has an impact on social policies especially when the government has been unsuccessful in addressing the low birth rate in Singapore. As the option to choose to abort was cited by the participants to be important, the way forward may be to have a standardized version of information for all secondary schools of what abortion is about to enable individuals to make informed decisions about them because currently, only certain schools have the information as the participants said in Chapter Six. Furthermore, some social policy changes may be necessary to provide a stronger supportive network for unwed mothers if they choose to place children up for adoption.

The participants also felt that there should be some moral education in schools starting with the secondary level to tertiary education. Since Singapore is a multi-religious and multi-cultural society, it would be helpful to introduce lessons on morality through the three approaches in the moral framework as set out in Chapter One as they offer a space for individuals to think ethically when confronted with a moral predicament. Knowledge of ethical principles would afford individuals to engage meaningfully with media as well as in their daily interactions with others when encountering difficult issues so they can make informed ethical decisions about them. More importantly, the study shows that the current ‘Shared Values’ and religious practices are inadequate in addressing moral concerns.

Regarding audience reception, Bird points out results are “not generalizable, because they are complex entities even if we acknowledge the importance of ‘global and national

economic and political forces in constructing the mediascape' [but] we should continue the goal of understanding ... real lives in which media plays an ever-increasing role" (Bird 190), especially problematic, when one lacks of media literacy. This is particularly pertinent to Singapore in its drive towards a 'knowledge economy'.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study sample originally included all religious categories but there were dropouts and no-shows which affected the sample. Hence, the Muslim and Hindu categories were not included in the study. The sample only included tertiary educated individuals who have not encountered any of the moral predicaments in the films. Furthermore, participants found it challenging to describe exactly how and what they feel when they experience the films which is a limitation of the phenomenological approach to film. For future studies, more films could be included from other genres. Participants from polytechnic and university undergraduates could also be included in a study with those who graduated and have been working for a few years to compare their perspectives on infidelity and abortion and key moral concerns.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject heading: **Seeking Your Perspectives on Hollywood films**

Dear NTU student

I am a graduate student in the English division at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) doing a research project on Hollywood Films. The goal of this study is to understand your perspectives on issues presented in the films.

What the study involves:

1. Attend screenings of 5 films with other student participants at NTU. Each film is approximately 2 hours
2. Complete a 10 minute questionnaire at the end of each film
3. Attend ONE personal interview at NTU of approximately 1.5 -2hours.

Incentive: \$65 cash to be paid out at the end of the interview session

Criteria for participants:

1. Born in Singapore
2. Completed at least 12 years (primary, secondary, post-secondary) education in any formal educational institution in Singapore
3. Between the ages of 19 – 39years
4. Watch English language movies at least once a month or more

When the study will be conducted

There will be five screenings on 10 August 2017 and 17 August 2017. You need to be present for these two days.

The interview for each participant will be conducted on Aug 23 and 24, 28 – 31, 2017. You need only attend ONE interview. There will be various timeslots available to choose.

More details will follow once you are selected to participate in the study.

Your participation is voluntary. Your responses and information will be kept confidential. Your participation will be a valuable addition to the body of work on audiences and the findings could lead to greater awareness of Singaporean perspectives on issues presented in these Hollywood films.

If you would like to participate in this study or learn more about the study, please email me: YCWong1@e.ntu.edu.sg. Thank you for your time.

Susan Wong

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please read this consent agreement carefully.

You are being invited to participate in a research study on your perspectives of moral conduct based on the issues presented in Hollywood films carried out by the researchers at Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

What would you be asked to do? You will watch five films at NTU on five different dates with other participants after which you will answer a questionnaire on each film. The films are adaptations of American novels. They deal with societal norms, familial and personal relationships, and personal choices in difficult situations. Each film is about 1.5 to 2 hours long. Each questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. At the end of all five film screenings, you will be asked to share your perspectives on the moral issues in the films and your personal attitudes towards these issues in a recorded one-on-one personal interview, which lasts about 1.5 to 2 hours with the researcher. The interview will take place in NTU. In some situations, the researcher will change the context of the questions to pursue a line of enquiry presented by you on your moral attitudes. It will only take about two to three months from the start of the first film screening to the interview stage. The whole research process will take 12 months.

Is your participation compulsory? Your participation is voluntary. At each stage of the research study before it begins, you will be fully informed of what you will be asked to do and be allowed to ask any questions at any time that you might have about the study. You may refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You are also free to withdraw from these studies at any time. Your decisions will not affect your grades or status at this university.

What would you gain? Participation in the research carried out by NTU researchers will provide you with the opportunity to acquire first-hand knowledge of the research process. In return for your participation, you will receive a small amount of monetary compensation of \$65. If participation is withdrawn midway, the amount will be pro-rated and will be paid at a mutually agreed time and place at NTU between the co-investigator and the participant.

What are the risks? The Internal Review Board (IRB) of Nanyang Technological University will review the study and this form will be relevant only when the Board has approved the study and determined that there are no anticipated risks, beyond those encountered in daily life, associated with participating in these studies.

How will my privacy be protected? Your responses will be kept private. The interview will be recorded with no identifying details and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. The recording will be stored on a digital recorder in a locked cabinet together with the questionnaires. Once the interview is transcribed, the recording will be deleted. The transcript with no identifiers will be stored

on an electronic device protected by a password. Only the co-investigator has the key to the locked cabinet and the password to the electronic device. The principal investigator may access the anonymised data to check the pertinent details of the research if need be. In the event of publication of this research, no personally identifying information will be disclosed. The questionnaires and transcript will be destroyed when the study is completed by December 2017.

Who should I contact for questions and clarifications? You are encouraged to contact Susan Wong at ycwong1@e.ntu.edu.sg for questions and clarifications and the Institutional Review Board via email at irb@ntu.edu.sg, or through phone call at 65-65922495. You may also contact Asst. Prof Richard Barlow at rbarlow@ntu.edu.sg but please contact Susan Wong in the first instance.

If you agree to be in these studies, please sign and return this form to NTU.

I have read the above information and give consent for my participation in these studies.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Please read this consent agreement carefully.

Your son/daughter is being invited to participate in a research study on his/her perspectives of moral conduct based on the issues presented in Hollywood films carried out by the researchers at Nanyang Technological University (NTU). Because your son/daughter is under the age of 21, we seek your consent to allow him/her to participate in this study.

What would your son/daughter be asked to do? Your son/daughter will watch five films at NTU on five different dates with other participants after which he/she will answer a questionnaire on each film. The films are adaptations of American novels. They deal with societal norms, familial and personal relationships, and personal choices in difficult situations. Each film is about 1.5 to 2 hours long. Each questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. At the end of all five film screenings, your son/daughter will be asked to share his/her perspectives on the moral issues in the films and their personal attitudes towards these issues in a recorded one-on-one personal interview which lasts about 1.5 to 2 hours with the researcher. The interview will take place in NTU. In some situations, the researcher will change the context of the questions to pursue a line of enquiry presented by your son/daughter on his/her moral attitudes. It will only take about two to three months from the start of the first film screening to the interview stage. The whole research process will take 12 months.

Is my son/daughter's participation compulsory? Your son/daughter's participation is voluntary. At each stage of the research study before it begins, your son/daughter will be fully informed of what he/she will be asked to do and be allowed to ask any questions at any time that he/she might have about the study. Your son/daughter may refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You are also free to withdraw your son/daughter from these studies at any time. Your and your son/daughter's decisions will not affect his/her grades or status at this university.

What would your son/daughter gain? Participation in the research carried out by NTU researchers will provide your son/daughter with the opportunity to acquire first-hand knowledge of the research process. In return for your son/daughter's participation, he or she will receive a small amount of monetary compensation of \$65.

If participation is withdrawn midway, the amount will be pro-rated and will be paid at a mutually agreed time and place at NTU between the co-investigator and the participant.

What are the risks to my son/daughter? The Internal Review Board (IRB) of Nanyang Technological University will review the study and this form will be relevant only when the Board has approved the study and determined that there are no anticipated risks, beyond those encountered in daily life, associated with participating in these studies.

How will my son/daughter's privacy be protected? Your son/daughter's responses will be kept private. The interview will be recorded with no identifying details and your son/daughter's name will be replaced with a pseudonym. The recording will be stored on a digital recorder in a locked cabinet together with the questionnaires. Once the interview is transcribed, the recording will be deleted. The transcript with no identifiers will be stored on an electronic device protected by a password. Only the co-investigator has the key to the locked cabinet and the password to the electronic device. The principal investigator may access the anonymised data to check the pertinent details of the research if need be. In the event of publication of this research, no personally identifying information will be disclosed. The questionnaires and transcript will be destroyed when the study is completed by December 2017.

Who should I contact for questions and clarifications? You are encouraged to contact Susan Wong at ycwong1@e.ntu.edu.sg for questions and clarifications and the Institutional Review Board via email at irb@ntu.edu.sg, or through phone call at 65-65922495. You may also contact Asst. Prof Richard Barlow at rbarlow@ntu.edu.sg but please contact Susan Wong in the first instance.

If you allow your son/daughter to be in these studies, please sign and return this form to NTU through your son/daughter.

I have read the above information and give consent for my son/daughter's participation in these studies.

Name of son/daughter: _____

Name of parent: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D: AGE OF INNOCENCE

Name:

Gender:

DOB:

School:

Race:

Religion:

1. Describe your experience of the film you have just watched. Be as specific and detailed as possible.
2. What issues do you think are portrayed in the film?
3. If the film modifies your perspectives on these issues presented in the film, please describe this change.
4. How would you describe the relationship between Ellen and Newland?
5. What do you think of May telling Ellen she is pregnant when she wasn't sure until later?
6. What sort of person do you think Ellen is?
7. What is your view on the Narrator's statement that "[Newland] was a dutiful, loving father and a faithful husband"?
8. What course of action(s) do you suppose Newland could have taken given his preference for Ellen? Be specific and detailed as possible.
9. What do you think of the film's ending?
10. Describe your experience of a particular scene that is meaningful to you. What is it about the scene that contributed to your experience? You can describe more than one scene.

APPENDIX E: BREAKING DAWN Part 1

Name:

Gender:

DOB:

School:

Race:

Religion:

1. Describe your experience of the film you have just watched. Be as specific and detailed as possible.
2. What issues do you think are portrayed in the film?
3. If the film modifies your perspectives on these issues presented in the film, please describe this change.
4. Considering that Bella's foetus is endangering her, what do you think is the best thing to do?
5. Describe how your body reacted in the scenes where the foetus is being taken out of Bella and her subsequent transformation.
6. How would you describe Bella's relationship with Jacob?
7. At the wedding, Edward says, "It's an extraordinary thing to meet someone who you can bare your soul to. And who will accept you for what you are." Describe how Edward's statements may have a bearing on your perception of a romantic relationship.
8. What is your opinion of Edward's statement that spouses are "supposed to be partners?"
9. At the wedding, Esme says, "We will cherish and protect [Bella] forever." Later she says, "[Bella] is a part of our family now," so the Cullens will risk their lives for her. Please describe how the statements may relate to your notion of 'family'.
10. Describe your experience of a particular scene that is meaningful to you. What is it about the scene that contributed to your experience? You can describe more than one scene.

APPENDIX F: BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

Name:

Gender:

DOB:

School:

Race:

Religion:

1. Describe your experience of the film you have just watched. Be as specific and detailed as possible.
2. What issues do you think are portrayed in the film?
3. If the film modifies your perspectives on these issues presented in the film, please describe this change.
4. In the letter addressed to her children, Francesca says she “never stopped loving [their] father,” Richard, just that “[her] love for Robert was different”. What is your understanding of her statements?
5. In the diner, Francesca overhears Henry’s comment that the man has a choice whether to have an affair but Eleanor says, “It’s the woman who’s in control in these situations.” What do you think?
6. How do you feel about Francesca’s decision to stay in her marriage?
7. What do you think about Michael’s statement to Carolyn that he “never cheated on Betty” while they were married but he wanted to “about a thousand times?”
8. Describe your experience of the scene where Francisca is sitting in her husband’s truck and Robert is waiting for her to leave with him. Be as detailed and specific as possible.
9. How do you feel about the relationship between Robert and Francesca given his statement that “This kind of certainty comes just once in a lifetime”?
10. Describe your experience of a particular scene that is meaningful to you. What is it about the scene that contributed to your experience? You can describe more than one scene.

APPENDIX G: CIDER HOUSE RULES

Name:

Gender:

DOB:

School:

Race:

Religion:

1. Describe your experience of the film you have just watched. Be as specific and detailed as possible.
2. What issues do you think are portrayed in the film?
3. If the film modifies your perspectives on these issues presented in the film, please describe this change.
4. What is your opinion of Dr Larch's work in terminating unwanted pregnancies?
5. What is your standpoint on Dr Larch's statement to Homer: "If you expect people to be responsible for their children, you have to give them the right to decide whether or not to have children"?
6. What do you think of Candy's reason for an abortion because she "couldn't have a baby with someone who is leaving [her]"?
7. How do you feel about Homer performing his first abortion on Rose when he had earlier said he was "happy to be alive" rather than be terminated as an unwanted pregnancy?
8. What is your view on the relationship between Candy and Homer?
9. Describe how you feel about the film's ending.
10. Describe your experience of a particular scene that is meaningful to you. What is it about the scene that contributed to your experience? You can describe more than one scene.

APPENDIX H: REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

Name:

Gender:

DOB:

School:

Race:

Religion:

1. Describe your experience of the film you have just watched. Be as specific and detailed as possible.
2. What issues do you think are portrayed in the film?
3. If the film modifies your perspectives on these issues presented in the film, please describe this change.
4. Describe your experience of the scene where April aborted her foetus and started bleeding after she came down the stairs.
5. What is your opinion on April's reason for terminating her pregnancy?
6. How would you describe the relationship between Frank and April?
7. What do you think of Shep continuing with his marriage with Milly after he declares he loves April in the car?
8. What sort of person do you think April is?
9. What do you think about Frank?
10. Describe your experience of a particular scene that is meaningful to you. What is it about the scene that contributed to your experience? You can describe more than one scene.

APPENDIX I: TOPIC GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW

Hello. Thank you for attending this interview, the purpose of which is to seek a better understanding of your experiences of moral issues depicted in the films and your perspectives. Your participation is voluntary and your responses and information will be confidential. First, we will start by discussing some of your responses to the written questionnaires from the film screenings. Then, we will continue with the interview questions. From your response to the question on ----- in (name of film), I would like to clarify-----
-----.

After clarification of films' responses:

Q. Have you been in any of the situations depicted in the films or at least come close to being in a predicament like the characters? Could you tell me about them?

Q. How many times a month do you watch English language movies? What types would those be?

Interview Questions

1. What is usually the source of guidance for you when you are in a predicament?
2. Whom do you normally turn to when you have difficulty coming to a decision?
3. What sort of qualities do you think a moral person possess?
4. What shapes your ideas about those qualities?
5. Could you describe what it means to be moral?
6. Could you tell me areas of your daily life where you applied what you were taught from the moral education received at school?

(a) How many years of education did you receive in Primary School?

(b) How many years post-Primary or Secondary did you receive?

(c) What about post-secondary?

Throughout your years in the Singapore educational system, could you tell me some of the moral lessons you were given that resonated with you until now?

Currently in NTU, is there any class that you have taken that has enabled you to think morally?

For participants who are affiliated with a religion.

7. How often do you attend religious services/classes?
 - (a) How often do you go to the temple/church?
 - (b) Your family religious background is also Freethinking / Taoist / Presbyterian/Baptist_____?
8. If you live your daily life according to your religious teachings, could you describe them?
9. Tell me about what your religion teaches about marriage.
10. How do you feel about religious restrictions on abortion?
11. Are there religious restrictions on contraception?

For participants who are not affiliated with any religion

12. If you live your daily life according to some forms of teachings, could you describe them?
Is your family not related to any religion? In other words, were you born into a religion and then converted?
13. How do you feel about abortion?

Marriage/Family

1. Please describe what 'family' means to you.
2. What does marriage mean to you?
3. What do you think are obligations of a spouse?
4. Which character from the film screenings do you think most display these obligations?
5. In what circumstances would you deem it acceptable for a couple to divorce?
6. What do you think are duties of a parent?
7. Which characters from the films do you think acted on those duties?
8. If your attitude about marriage has changed since watching the films, please describe this change.

(In)fidelity

1. How would you describe infidelity?
2. From the films we have seen, which characters would you say have been unfaithful?
3. Please describe your experience of the scene(s) where a character's infidelity is unacceptable to you.
4. What is your opinion of someone who is unfaithful?
5. What do you think a person should do when s/he has been unfaithful?
6. What does it mean to be faithful?
7. Please describe your experience of the scene(s) where a character's fidelity meets your expectation.
8. Could you describe which scene/film that may have modified your views on infidelity?

Abortion

1. At what stage of a pregnancy would you classify as the beginning of human life?
2. In your opinion, what do you think is the right thing to do with an unwanted pregnancy?
3. From the films you have watched, whose abortion do you think is an acceptable solution?
4. In what circumstance do you think abortion is unacceptable?
5. Who do you think has a right to decide whether a foetus should be aborted?
6. What is your attitude towards someone who has had an abortion?
7. What sort of options do you think a woman has if a foetus is defective?
8. Who do you think has a right to decide whether a foetus should live?

(a) If you say it's a woman's right to choose to abort, would you say it is also her choice to keep the foetus?

(b) What about if the foetus will cause her to die?

(c) Do you think the father of the foetus should be consulted at all?

In cases of rape etc., what is the best option do you think, given that now there is a morning-after pill...?

9. What do you suppose could be done if a foetus has the potential to harm others in future?
10. If your attitude towards abortion has changed since you attended the filmscreenings, please describe this change.
11. What are your views on killing if it could potentially save other lives?

Promises/Lying

1. Could you tell me if there are instances where it is acceptable to lie?
2. Would you say keeping the truth from someone is the same as lying?
3. Which character in the films do you think is the most truthful?
4. What does keeping a promise mean to you?
5. Could you tell me if there are instances where it is all right to break promises?
6. Which character in the films would you say keeps promises?

Could you tell me the movie you most prefer in this study and your reasons for your choice?

What about your least preferred film?

We have come to the end of the interview. Is there anything you would like to add or discuss with me? Thank you very much for your time in participating in this study.

APPENDIX J: NVIVO ABORTION (Utilitarianism)

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Athlyn>](#) - § 6 references coded [1.38% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.20% Coverage

They can just do the abortion. I guess in the end, it's the same consequence, just terminating the pregnancy. Uhm, whichever way, they're more comfortable with.

Reference 2 - 0.27% Coverage

feel that if you don't think you can raise the baby well, or if you have some doubts about it, it's a lot better to terminate the pregnancy even if it's five months because you're saving it from a lifetime of pain.

Reference 3 - 0.08% Coverage

if I didn't want the pregnancy, uhm, I guess I would abort it.

Reference 4 - 0.15% Coverage

actually I would just abort it even if it's five or six months, if I really don't want to bring a child into this world,

Reference 5 - 0.25% Coverage

the potential for it to be great, and also for it to be not so great. And I think the potential for it not to be great...those thoughts really have a significant impact on the person making that decision.

Reference 6 - 0.44% Coverage

how much of the chances that this child is going to do something great for this world? And more, is this child going to have a decent life, have a family and blah, blah, blah? But they're probably not going to make a huge significant difference In contrast, the number of things that can go wrong is plenty, so I think that's more powerful than...the positive.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Augusta>](#) - § 2 references coded [0.24% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.12% Coverage

Because it's not an actual life form. Because it's not like a being.

Reference 2 - 0.12% Coverage

The potential of the baby being a human being does not play a part.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Batista>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.12% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.12% Coverage

I think if you cannot afford, you should either abort, or give the child up for adoption.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Buena>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.17% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.17% Coverage

how do I say this, I would, kind of, umm I would be more concerned over the mother than the baby.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Burnette>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.22% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.22% Coverage

don't think you should bring them into the world if you are not able to emotionally or financially support the kid. I don't think you're doing the kid any good. In that case, I would say, it's involuntary, have to abort lah.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Cato>](#) - § 3 references coded [0.71% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.18% Coverage

but let's say at the point in time, there's a condition that makes the baby... uh, what do you call it? Premature death, then I would say abort it.

Reference 2 - 0.13% Coverage

The other one I would say if they are born with a condition that will... where they will suffer, then abort

Reference 3 - 0.39% Coverage

I think it has to depend on the kind of genetic defect. If bringing that kid into society, and he needs to be on life support forever, then I would say there's no reason to bring him into this world. And it's not going to be a financial burden for the parents also, because life support is very expensive.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Freda>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.16% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.16% Coverage

Um, I feel that if there's a valid reason for abortion, then it could do both the adult and the child good.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Frederick>](#) - § 3 references coded [0.50% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.05% Coverage

I am for abortion I think.

Reference 2 - 0.22% Coverage

if you think about the prospect, think about the future of the unwanted kid, in the future their life will not be so good also lah.

Reference 3 - 0.24% Coverage

Whereas if you were to compare to abortion, it's like you remove the kid but then if you want another kid next time, you still can have a kid.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Presley>](#) - § 3 references coded [1.20% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.52% Coverage

This is because if I'm pregnant and I really don't want the baby because of how the baby will actually affect me. If I say, yeah, I know it's legally wrong but I really need it gone because I can't sustain this baby... I'm still young or something. I don't even have the means to provide for myself, so I don't want it to suffer, that kind of thing, so I want an abortion now.

Reference 2 - 0.38% Coverage

Like, now, currently with this mindset, I would choose to abort it. Because I know that people with Down's Syndrome can live to about 40 years plus-plus-plus, and be really successful. But I don't know how I can guarantee their life will be really successful and happy in the end

Reference 3 - 0.30% Coverage

Like, I don't know if I'm patient enough and selfless enough to dedicate my life to make sure that my unborn child would have the best life. Like, can be well taken care of, have good quality of life, things like that.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Tami>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.25% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.25% Coverage

I don't know why also, but I feel my cousin should have aborted her child. I don't think that's the right guy for her also. She's so young.

APPENDIX K: NVIVO INFIDELITY (KANT Codings)

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Agatha CELSE>](#) - § 3 references coded [0.30% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.15% Coverage

it's just a basic human thing, you respect the person you're with and you don't cheat on them. Like that's just a basic thing.

Reference 2 - 0.11% Coverage

if you have an existing agreement with someone, you don't cheat on them without telling them

Reference 3 - 0.04% Coverage

I mean straying is straying, right?

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Agnes>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.08% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.08% Coverage

I think I said that cheating is wrong, right?

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Athlyn>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.11% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.11% Coverage

I guess they're definitely untrustworthy, dishonest, and yeah untrustworthy, dishonest.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Augusta>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.16% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.16% Coverage

Because a marriage is already like a commitment to a person, so it's wrong. It's still wrong.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Buffy>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.35% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.35% Coverage

I feel like, if you think about cheating, you show that you want to, so the intention/the motive is already there. But you just don't act on it which is good lah, but I feel that if you don't think of it, it's even better.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Cato>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.12% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.12% Coverage

Infidelity, that one is also... it's not morally right because you are cheating on your wife.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Freda>](#) - § 3 references coded [0.39% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.14% Coverage

Cheating is cheating. Not even talking about married. Even if you're in a relationship, yeah.

Reference 2 - 0.07% Coverage

I don't think you should even be holding hands.

Reference 3 - 0.18% Coverage

He's still not doing the right thing because he knows obviously like, it was a married woman that he was messing around with.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Tami>](#) - § 2 references coded [0.20% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.13% Coverage

I believe that cheating is always wrong. So, no matter what, it's wrong,

Reference 2 - 0.07% Coverage

But it's not right. It's not morally right

APPENDIX L: MORAL EDUCATION

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Agatha>](#) - § 13 references coded [3.25% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.06% Coverage

They called it *Hao Gong Ming* or something like that

Reference 2 - 0.26% Coverage

In my time, they had some kind of general education requirement, and there was a bunch of different classes you could choose, but I don't think there was a mandated like, you have to take like, moral or civic education.

Reference 3 - 0.47% Coverage

I mean ethics, right, it's really important because I don't know, perhaps all immigrants need to have an ethics class because then, you can really think about the issues because often, if you don't have this ethics class, then that's where people do like, academic dishonesty and things like that. You can't really blame them because they've never had a class or they've probably never thought about it.

Reference 4 - 0.39% Coverage

The one that I had to attend when I was doing my Master's was particularly good cos they had a lot of scenarios like, it was run by a guy who was like, on the board of like, these ethical appeals and he just brought like, these issues up for discussion, like anonymously of course, in a way that you know, just made it very real to us

Reference 5 - 0.32% Coverage

Face to face. Like, the one here is online ... I felt it was written *thinking* I don't know, it just wasn't as powerful as like, when the guy was discussing all these cases, right? I think the one online has scenarios as well but it just felt less ethical for some reason.

Reference 6 - 0.30% Coverage

feel that often when people write these things they have a very clear bias. I feel like I'm always being guided towards a decision like, there's this right answer and I'm like, real life is not like that. I get it, you have to arbitrate like, right or wrong,

Reference 7 - 0.20% Coverage

but I think having the more complex discussion of what was really going on in those situations really helped me take the broader issue and understand what was going on.

Reference 8 - 0.22% Coverage

Cos it's very easy for us to judge like, this guy is dumb, like why did he falsify his data but there are things you don't really think of like pressure from the boss or things like that.

Reference 9 - 0.37% Coverage

I think in university is helpful cos it's when you really start thinking about issues, right? I don't know if you went through the Singapore school system but it was pretty much rote learning, so I just felt that everything had a fixed answer and we weren't really taught how to explore going through the system here.

Reference 10 - 0.37% Coverage

It could be written on paper. That's what I view as missed opportunities in the Singapore school system because even in secondary school, we all did English Lit and you have these scenarios but we just never really talked about them very much. I felt like we always had a right answer we were being steered towards

Reference 11 - 0.02% Coverage

I prefer a discussion

Reference 12 - 0.24% Coverage

I think it would be helpful to be able to talk about more of these issues a bit more candidly, because they're often like, surrounded by so much stigma and taboo that we're not even allowed to discuss it

Reference 13 - 0.04% Coverage

Like incest and rape, abortion.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Batista>](#) - § 8 references coded [3.75% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.57% Coverage

I: So, in your six years in primary school, did you have any religious education or moral education?

B: Yeah, I think there was a civics and moral education... I don't know, I can't remember much of it.

I: Is that a different course to the religious teaching course?

B: There's no religious teaching course. They cannot force you to go, if I'm not wrong. You could go, but I don't think I ever attended. No.

Reference 2 - 0.18% Coverage

I: So, you went for the moral education...

B: Had to go.. (laughter).. it's part of the curriculum. I don't remember anything from it.

Reference 3 - 0.55% Coverage

I: Poly, obviously, no moral education. Or did you take a course...

B: I think probably some online module or something.

I: Which talks about...?

B: Not sure (laughs) Nobody remembers anything about online modules. I don't remember specifically, but I'm sure there was something like, don't cheat, don't steal, stuff like that.

I: So, it didn't resonate with you?

B: No.

Reference 4 - 0.43% Coverage

I: But what about at NTU?

B: I'm taking the Ethics and Moral Reasoning now. But that's an online module. Actually, it's really interesting leh. Like, I really enjoy myself when I watch the videos. It's very interesting I feel.

Reference 5 - 0.64% Coverage

I: Give me an example of what you find interesting.

B: Like, it's a very introductory course I think. So, they talk about utilitarianism.

I: Utilitarianism, which is what you just mentioned.

B: Deontology and can't remember what's the third one...

I: Virtue Ethics?

B: Yeah, Virtue Ethics. So, I'm until here only.

I: Three?

B: Yeah, these three.

I: You mean there are others?

B: I mean you have to watch the videos, unlock the next one, so I'm now only at Virtue Ethics.

Reference 6 - 0.25% Coverage

Even online, there's a question. Which one are you more inclined, and you can see the responses of other people. But I'm pretty sure, a lot of people don't take this course seriously

Reference 7 - 1.02% Coverage

I: Okay, these three frameworks, right? Let's apply it to infidelity. So, these three frameworks, what would the philosophers from these three frameworks say about infidelity? Based on your understanding of what you have read online.

B: Hmm, utilitarianism, talk about the greater good, right? So, I guess... that doesn't agree... I think it would depend on the situation but infidelity is something where you are satisfying yourself and your partner, and you are affecting a lot of people in your previous life, so the greater good is not there. And then for Deontology, I know for Deontology, there's the law of universality, so if everybody does this, right, is it feasible? If everybody is leaving, then there's nobody to be faithful to.

Reference 8 - 0.10% Coverage

I: Utilitarianism? Who did they put? Mill or Bentham?

B: I think John Mill