Voice and Representation: A Postcolonial Approach To Higher Education Promotional Media And The International Postgraduate Student Experience

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Abstract

Non-Western postgraduate students are increasingly targeted by Western universities through a variety of promotional media designed to assist in their selection of a foreign institution. This media offers institutional representations of the international postgraduate student based on a range of prescriptive, often stereotypical notions of particular cultural groups. In this thesis, I argue that although the internationalization of higher education (HE) has resulted in the embedding of intercultural elements across various sectors of the university, the discourses and images used do not offer international postgraduate students a productive space to convey their identities as active participants of the overseas study experience. Drawing on the promotional media from one Western university, I illustrate how these students are portrayed as the passive but fortunate recipients of an international education and how the university claims its own institutional identity.

With the growing demand for international education, media representations of international students and the university has become an important area of study. To date, the study of HE promotional media has consisted of pure textual analyses of student prospectuses or perspective studies related to the overseas study experience of undergraduate students. Although international postgraduate students are important to university rankings and collaborative research partnerships, there has been limited investigation into the representation of this cohort and the university in HE promotional media. Additionally, the perspectives of these students on their representation and the overseas study experience remain unexplored.

Drawing on the work of postcolonial theorists such as Said, Spivak and Bhabha, I critically examine how international postgraduate students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are represented in HE promotional media and the creative ways in which they reinvent themselves. The analysis of participant narratives reveals that their expectations of the overseas study experience are influenced by ideas of institutional prestige, English Language
mastery, staff expertise, creative advertising, quality education and warm human relationships. However, the reality of their overseas study experience is often tempered with isolation and alienation leading to a deeper reflection of their burgeoning identities as global scholars. This inner journey is conveyed through a series of photographs which highlight themes of the restorative powers of Nature, mobility in a new city, cultural life, finding an identity, creating a community, coping with loneliness and embracing freedom. To locate patterns within the discourses and images related to international postgraduate students and the university in a selection of HE promotional media, I refer to the work of critical discourse theorists such as Fairclough and Van Dijk. The analysis of university web pages reveals that the university claims its institutional identity through an alignment with its research activities, evoking its rich historical past and claiming credibility through certifications obtained from international regulatory bodies such as the Nobel Foundation.

This thesis uncloaks the subtle ways that ideas about universities and individuals are normalized through discourses and images constructed by powerful social institutions. By drawing on postcolonial literature and sourcing the perspectives of less dominant voices, I provide unique insights into how this cohort negotiates the overseas study experience and claim their distinct identities in an unfamiliar environment.
Author declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Lalitha Velautham
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Chapter 1: Introductory Background

1.0 Introduction

The discursive practices associated with the marketization of higher education are numerous and many genres of higher education such as flyers, posters, postcards, brochures and home pages on websites have become fully promotional texts in their own right, not trying to hide or disclose their main purpose: to attract fee-paying students to come to the university to study. (Askehave 2007, p.275)

Recently, there has been a global increase in demand for international tertiary education. In Australia, as of July 2012, there were 223,043 international students enrolled in the Higher Education sector with the two biggest source markets being China (41%) and Malaysia (7.2%) respectively (AEI 2012). This surge has accelerated competition between universities to capture the international student market. Universities have gone beyond the traditional education expo and "word of mouth" marketing strategies of local education agents to develop sophisticated media campaigns characterized by glossy brochures and eye-catching advertisements supported by technologically savvy web texts and embedded social media content. However, mirroring attitudes found in earlier colonial times, the international student voice is often silent in these publications. In this investigation, I illustrate how Higher Education (HE) promotional media in one Australian university is created to reflect representations of international postgraduate students that may rely more on glossy marketing strategies than realistic depictions of the overseas study experience.

The intensified use of new media to promote HE has increasingly become an area of research interest. Scholars are beginning to move beyond matters surrounding the technological change to question the purpose, intention and messages behind HE promotional media. In this thesis, I examine how the identities of both the university and its international postgraduate students are constructed and represented in a selection of HE promotional media. With reference
to international postgraduate students, my central concern is to investigate the multitude of depictions surrounding their academic identities. Recently, the mainstream media has depicted this cohort as the passive victims of crime (Turtle 2009, 22 May), poor academic performers with questionable English Language skills (Dunn 2011, 19 December) and a lucrative resource capable of boosting the economy (Craig 2010, 23 May). On the other hand, a passing glance of HE promotional media from various universities reveal the happy faces of smiling international students walking purposefully through the well-manicured lawns of a majestic campus. Based on these contrasting images, one cannot help but ask how are the identities of international students being constructed? How is the university being constructed? More importantly, how do newly arrived international students perceive these media representations of themselves, the overseas study experience and their university? In order to examine the ways in which the identities of international students are constructed in a range of media, Fairclough (2001, p.236) suggests unpacking the “network of practices” in which the subject under investigation is being depicted. In this study, the subject refers to media representations of international postgraduate students and the “network of practices” consists of university promotional media, mainstream media and scholarly observations of the subject.

In the above quotation, Inger Askehave (2007) highlights the various media available to a university to entice prospective students. From print to online media, universities have a range of resources available at their disposal to capture the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of international students long before they leave their home country to attend the foreign university of their choice. These promotional media have now become a great resource to scholars who are interested in investigating the messages conveyed by universities and the ways in which various key players in this communicative setting are represented and positioned. As universities embrace the “internationalization” (defined in Section 1.4) of higher education (HE) and embed intercultural elements across all sectors of the university, HE promotional media is fast becoming
a rich medium to communicate an international study experience to prospective international students.

This study approaches the inquiry into the representation of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media through the critical perspective of postcolonial theory. A postcolonial theoretical framework is relevant to this study because it facilitates in the deconstruction of media messages by challenging accepted social roles, values and intended messages. In this study, the object of analysis is a selection of HE promotional media relevant to international postgraduate students, which is produced by university marketing departments according to set norms and beliefs about this cohort. Therefore, a perusal of HE promotional media reveals much about how the university as an institution views prospective international postgraduate students and aspects of the university they consider desirable.

A brief examination of media constructions of international students in HE promotional media reveals a range of interesting images. One such image is what I view as that of the “seeker” travelling vast distances to obtain knowledge. The overseas study experience is depicted as the selling of an experience akin to those permeating travel brochures promising new vistas and breathtaking landscapes incomparable to anywhere else. As pointed out by some scholars, the emphasis is on a rewarding overseas experience with little or no mention of academic standards and the expectations of the institution (Fairclough 1993; Askehave 2007). Beyond the promotional media created by universities, another rich resource capturing depictions of international students can be found in the mainstream media. Recently, there has been a range of mainstream media articles depicting international students as the bruised victims of racial attacks or lamenting the fact that declining international student enrolments would adversely affect the Australian economy. Some of the labels attributed to international students include “cash cows” (Craig 2010, 23 May) and “soft targets” (Turtle 2009, 22 May). Besides these unflattering descriptions, the mainstream media has also played a powerful role in relegating international students to the position of the
deficient foreigner with questionable English Language skills. In an article in *The Age* newspaper, international students were depicted as linguistically challenged while university lecturers were positioned as the victims who were under considerable pressure to lower standards in order to pass these students (Dunn 2011, 19 December). In addition to HE promotional media and the mainstream media, another source that captures media representations of international students can be found scholarly literature. As scholarly interest peaks in relation to media representations of international students, a growing body of literature has emerged.

In this chapter, I briefly discuss the impact of the internationalization process on HE promotional media designed for the international postgraduate student market. Next, I present the motivation for this thesis and situate the topic within the broad research areas of media and educational studies. A brief review of relevant literature is discussed leading to the research objectives followed by a discussion on relevant theories to unpack key issues around institutional practices, identities, discourses and the overseas study experience of international postgraduate students. Finally, I conclude this chapter by outlining the overall structure of this thesis.

### 1.1 The internationalization process

Previous research has highlighted the “simplistic stereotyping” of international students and scholars have called for additional research on international students’ perceptions of themselves to avoid viewing them as “one-dimensional.” (Haugh 2008, p.207). However, these studies have failed to provide insights on how international students themselves construct their identities from the point of contact with HE promotional media to the actualization of their identities in relation to the overseas study experience. Therefore, in this thesis, I approach the investigation into student identities by examining the ways in which their identities are “performed and strategically claimed,” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.42-43). In response to Haugh’s (2008) call for further investigation into the ways in which international students perceive themselves, I aim to investigate the
overseas student experience of international postgraduate students in relation to their identities as consumers of education and as researchers within the Australian university context. In this thesis, which is situated in a participatory research framework, I seek to understand social phenomena as they are experienced by people and uncover the collective experiences of people from similar cultural backgrounds through their own voices. Furthermore, I explore the role of the students’ identity in the depiction of international postgraduate students in HE promotional material. As discussed above, the tensions in media constructions of international students across the “network of practices” (Fairclough 2001, p.236) lead to the following fundamental questions: Do media constructions of international students reveal an inconsistency in relation to the overseas study experience and aspirations of international students? Have depictions of international students in higher education promotional media promoted a stereotypical representation of their identity as international scholars?

According to Devos (2003), the role of the media in the construction of international students is significant. On the one hand, international students are valued for their economic contribution and on the other hand, they are presented as “the foreign and “the other” who is responsible for declining academic standards characterized by poor English language skills (Devos 2003, p.164). Questions surrounding media representations of minority groups are not new. A number of studies have investigated the formation of norms based on the social constructions of various groups in the media. These social constructions are sometimes related to various professions such as the study by Donelan et al.(2008) that investigated the impact of media images of nursing and found that the public view of nurses was one of high regard and respect based on the media images offered to them. However, even within professional characterizations, race can play a part. For example, in the North American context, Nasir, McLaughlin and Jones (2009) explored the range of media messages offered to African American youth in popular media and discovered that the predominant image of African American men was
that of criminals, sports personalities or entertainers. Similarly, Mastro, Behm-Morawitza and Ortiza (2007) examined public perceptions of the Latin American community based on popular television programs and concluded that the negative media portrayal of the community had implications for their real-world treatment. As illustrated above, it is clear that the media plays a significant role in constructing the identities of particular professional, social and ethnic groups. These media constructions then have a considerable impact on the ways in which people view and treat various groups and cultures.

As universities embrace new media to promote HE, images of international students and the overseas study experience flourish. In my view, these media constructions present the overseas study experience through the lens of the institution, leaving little room for engagement and self-representation on the part of the students themselves. While some universities have embedded videos featuring international students, these videos appear scripted and staged. In the light of this, I argue that new media could potentially be utilized as a tool to provide a deeper understanding about the expectations and aspirations of international students. These new media communication platforms pave the way for less dominant groups to lend their voice to media constructions of their identity consistent with their realities, paving the way for greater self-representation. In this study, I utilize a novel research tool called photovoice (discussed in detail in Section 1.6) to source the expectations and aspirations of international postgraduate students in relation to the overseas study experience. Photovoice serves as a useful medium to obtain these diverse viewpoints in a research study environment.

By sourcing authentic depictions of the overseas study experience from their international postgraduate students through a variety of new media communication platforms, universities may counter the negative images presented by the mainstream media. Many of the images and incidents presented in the mainstream media are based on individual incidents that may not necessarily reflect the experiences of the wider international student population. However, as
these images are the only ones available to international students about their target destination, it stands to reason that these images will dominate in the minds of international students. As mentioned above, the increase in negative portrayals of the overseas study experience in the mainstream Australian media has resulted in a climate of fear among some international students. An article written by a Chinese student discusses the very real fears that international students have in relation to the dramatic rise of racial attacks in Australia when the writer laments that although international students are drawn to the great Australian lifestyle, diverse culture and outstanding academic reputation, they do not feel accepted (Dong 2012, 11 May). However, the engagement of international students as co-creators of HE promotional media content could potentially benefit the university by presenting alternative viewpoints. Hence, from a methodological perspective, I aim to utilize a visual ethnographic approach to obtain authentic insights into the overseas study experience from the research participants in this study. Visual ethnography, as Sarah Pink (2007) points out, is a novel research approach that gives voice or agency to the subjects in the images and reveals their experiences through the lens of their camera. This moves the focus away from institutional discourses and discernments and hands the power back to minority groups, thereby creating a more accurate depiction of their day to day lives.

The expression and communication of identity in media representations of various groups within a specific communicative setting is a central concern of this thesis. A brief examination of HE promotional media reveals that international students have been boxed into the roles of what I see as the “seeker” or “traveller” in search of knowledge in a distant land. However, one cannot help but ask if these are the only identities that are applicable to the international student? What other identities can be discerned from the overseas study experience? In this study, I ask research participants to share their views on how they have made the transition into a new academic culture. In doing so, I aim to obtain insights into the ways in which international
students have re-invented themselves from passive consumers of HE promotional media to active participants in the overseas study experience.

1.2 Identifying the postgraduate student experience

The heart of this thesis centres on unearthing visual and narrative representations of the postgraduate overseas study experience due to the dearth of information on the subject. Previously, extensive research was conducted in relation to the undergraduate overseas study experience (Gatfield 1997; Gatfield, Barker et al. 1999; Gray, Fam et al. 2003) but far less is known in terms of the postgraduate overseas study experience. In my view, this is a key area for further investigation as the international postgraduate student cohort is an invaluable student demographic. In this study, I focus my investigation on the experiences of international students undertaking postgraduate degrees by research (not coursework) because they offer unique cross-cultural research partnerships that foster collaborative research networks across the globe. As Evans (2007) observes in her study of one School of Nursing in Britain, these students are a valuable resource that potentially serve as facilitators for achieving greater understanding between different cultural groups, promote an exchange of ideas and create links that could be beneficial over a long term. In addition, international postgraduate research students also bring talent and a wealth of expertise to the development of a range of study areas.

Besides the points mentioned above, postgraduate research students also provide more direct benefits to universities because postgraduate completions are essential to university success and improved rankings. Funding received from postgraduate research student completions enable universities to obtain revenue in the form of research funding derived from the vast array of study areas that they pursue. This funding is crucial as it serves to develop new as well as established areas of study. Another factor driving an inquiry into the experiences of international postgraduate research students at an Australian university is the fact that this
student demographic consists largely of mature age students whose expectations of the overseas study experience are considerably different to the undergraduate experience. Also, their experiences would be different from students undertaking course work due to the nature of study for a research degree where regular classroom interaction and examinations are not the norm. Therefore, more research into their views is needed especially in these times of increased competition between universities both locally and globally. As mentioned in Chapter 5 (p.156), the participants in this study are research students from diverse disciplines and countries. I have chosen not to use the term “international postgraduate research students” throughout the thesis because the university’s promotional media for the international postgraduate cohort makes no distinction between those who are doing coursework or research. The aim of the university’s promotional media is to introduce prospective postgraduate students to the university and the study options available to them. Hence, I use the more general term “international postgraduate students” in this thesis.

In my investigation into the representation of international postgraduate students, I draw on a range of academic publications including the work of Homi Bhabha to derive insights into the ways in which international postgraduate students reinvent themselves in HE promotional media beyond the limited subject positions accorded to them. While previous studies (Gatfield 1997; Gatfield, Barker et al. 1999) into international student perceptions of the overseas study experience provided rich empirical data, in this study, I aim to obtain deeper insights into these already identified categories by unpacking the rich narratives of the participants themselves. In their work, Gatfield, Barker and Graham (1999) have identified a number of categories such as academic instruction, campus life, recognition of university qualification and guidance from student services. However, the student experience was not explored in great depth and detail. This is characteristic of a large scale empirical study. Therefore, in my study, I aim to expand on Gatfield, Barker & Graham’s (1999) categories by tapping into the authentic experiences of
international postgraduate students. For example, in my study, under the subcategory, “public transport” (Gatfield, Barker & Graham 1999), I investigate the issue of mobility on campus in more detail using participant narratives and images obtained from visual ethnographic data presented by the research participants themselves. By doing so, I discovered that public transport features largely as a key area of concern for the participants and there is limited research into concerns surrounding issues of mobility, transportation and cost. My investigation into this issue has identified a possible mismatch between the messages in HE promotional media and the reality on the ground. While the HE promotional media featured breathtaking landscapes and pleasant vistas, some participants in this study lamented the costs associated with travelling great distances in a big city in Australia. Although public transportation concessions are offered to students in South Australia, many participants in this study mentioned that their scholarship money could not cover the associated travel costs, making the overseas study experience dismal in terms of mobility. This reality is in contrast to depictions in HE promotional media featuring smiling international students scaling mountains and exploring the exquisite scenery in their new international education destination.

Based on the broad aim identified above, this thesis is driven by the following specific objectives:

1) To identify the institutional and narrative identities expressed in a selection of HE promotional media for the international postgraduate student cohort.

2) To identify the assumptions that defines the portrayal of the university and international postgraduate students in HE promotional media.

3) To document representations of the overseas study experience by international postgraduate students.
4) To compare representations of the overseas study experience by international postgraduate students with HE promotional media created by the university.

1.3 Defining higher education promotional media

The increasing need for international education has resulted in accelerated competition between universities. In order to capture the international student market, sophisticated promotional strategies have been utilized in the creation of relevant higher education (HE) promotional media. According to Askehave (2007, p.725), HE promotional media consists of “flyers, posters, postcards, brochures and home pages on websites.” In my thesis, when I discuss HE promotional media, I am referring to web content that is relevant to the international postgraduate student demographic. This content relates to material depicting the first point of contact, which is, the university home page, the international student page, the postgraduate student page and the university research page. In addition to these web pages, this thesis is also concerned with content depicting the categories identified by Gatfield, Barker and Graham (1999, p.74) namely, “Campus Life” which relates to content covering “good natural and physical environment, personal safety on campus, public transport, health services, food services, social cultural activities, campus housing and sports and recreation facilities.” In my thesis, these categories form the scope of what is meant by content related to international postgraduate students in HE promotional media. I have set these categories as the parameters of my study as it would be impossible to obtain rich qualitative data on all the categories identified in a large quantitative study such as the one carried out by Gatfield and Barker (1997).

Research on HE promotional media is becoming increasingly relevant to universities. According to Fairclough (1993, p.143), limited government funding has repositioned universities as “businesses competing to sell their products to consumers.” Hence, universities today are under pressure to create materials that capture the interest and imagination of an increasingly
technologically savvy consumer. Students today have access to a range of technology. As Weiler (2005) observes, Generation Y, in particular, prefers to access information from the Internet whether for private or professional purposes as opposed to using the print media. This has implications for universities in their pursuit to attract and capture the imagination and attention of a whole new generation of international students.

In the past, universities utilized posters and brochures to advertise their courses and to promote their particular university branding. However, as Callahan (2005) points out, the advent of the Internet has changed the way universities communicate with prospective students. The key advantage of online HE promotional media is that it can be accessed immediately at any time by a diverse global audience. It is this feature of HE promotional media that forms the primary emphasis of my thesis. In particular, I am interested in how universities construct international postgraduate student identities and the institutional identities of the university in online HE promotional media. Also, I am interested in international postgraduate student perceptions of the online HE promotional media that they accessed prior to arriving at their university of choice and the overseas study experience upon arrival.

Previous research on HE promotional media consisted largely of content analyses of university promotional print media (Mortimer 1997; Gatfield, Barker et al. 1999; Hesketh and Knight 1999). Other scholars like Gray et al. (2003) investigated the media sources used by undergraduate students to know more about their prospective university of choice. In these studies, online HE promotional media such as university websites were not analysed to uncover media constructions of the key players concerned. Instead, consistent with the aims of marketing studies, the emphasis was on increasing student numbers with quantitative data supporting undergraduate student choice of university.
In my thesis, the term “higher education promotional media” is used to refer to web content related to the postgraduate student demographic. The web content was analysed to reveal the discursive constructions at work in constructing international postgraduate students’ identities and the institutional identities of the university. Hence, in my thesis, I draw on the work of Fairclough (1993, p.143), who states that the “orders of discourse” in HE promotional media has changed dramatically over the years due to the ‘marketization of the discursive practices in contemporary (British) universities.” Although Fairclough’s (1993) comments were directed towards print-based HE promotional media created by British universities, I make the case that the same practices are at work in online HE promotional media. Thus, one of the aims of my study is to unearth these practices at an Australian university with special emphasis on material targeting international postgraduate students.

Besides the dramatic changes to the “orders in discourse” in higher education promotional media, Fairclough (1993, p.156) observes that there has also been significant changes to the “visual and design features.” In fact, he argues that HE promotional media today has gone from merely being a humble resource of information to one that caters to the appetites and desires of young people, equal to any magazine on a news stand. Other scholars like Callahan (2005, p.240) echo Fairclough’s (1993) comments on the visual layout of HE promotional media by highlighting the role of an organization’s home page which is to serve as a “virtual gateway.” Callahan (2005, p.240) observes that the sophisticated use of a rich tapestry of unique visual features on their website assists an organization in presenting their own unique brand and image to prospective clients. It is an inquiry into these visual features in online HE promotional media and its impact on international postgraduate students’ identities that is of concern to me in my thesis.

In my thesis, I investigate the visual and textual features in online HE promotional media in response to the call of previous scholars who have signalled the failure of print media
campaigns. As Mazzarol and Hosie (1996, p.46) observe, previous print media campaigns by Australian universities were not particularly successful because they were “poorly devised, with too much emphasis on glossy image and inadequate, unnecessary detail.” Further to that, in my thesis, I also respond to the call of Callahan (2005) and Ashkehave (2007) who point to the power of the Internet and new technologies to transform the ways in which the university is set to communicate with prospective international students.

1.4 Towards the internationalization of higher education

The internationalization of higher education (HE) has been widely discussed by many scholars. Before examining the ways in which the term is used in this study it is useful to observe the different approaches in how scholars have defined internationalization when applied to the HE context. According to Arum and van de Water (1992, p.202), internationalization can be viewed as the “multiple activities, programs and services that fall within international studies, international education exchange and technical cooperation.” Knight (1994, p.7) on the other hand, defines “internationalization as the “process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution.” In a similar vein, in his analysis of the term, Marginson (1999, p.19) stresses that internationalization refers to individual nations and their interactions with other countries because the focus is on the “nation-state as the essential unit.” Therefore, in Marginson’s (1999) view, each nation is viewed as an independent entity. Other scholars such as Hamilton (1998, p.1), stress that international goes beyond trade relationships between nations and in the context of HE, “involves scholarship, research and management issues as well as staff, domestic student and curriculum issues.” Harman (2005, p.120) echoes this view by stating that when the term internationalization is applied to the HE context, it refers to “a process of integrating international or inter-cultural dimensions into the teaching, research and service functions of higher education institutions.”
Based on scholarly definitions of the internationalization of higher education as illustrated above, the main feature appears to be the embedding of intercultural elements across all facets of the university. The goal of this practice is to create and promote an international learning experience. Today, universities are embracing the use of new media communication platforms to capture a wider international student market. In doing so, the impact of internationalization on the creation of HE promotional media cannot be ignored. Hence, universities carefully consider how the ethos of internationalization can be successfully conveyed in their media campaigns. One of the ways this being done by universities is to embed the discourse of internationalization in the media campaigns. As Sidhu (2004, p.58) observes, the discourse of internationalization is evident in the 2001 Queensland University of Technology brochure where phrases celebrating multiculturalism and diversity were abundant as seen in phrases such as “Our campuses are cosmopolitan”, “almost 4,000 students from over 80 countries” and academic programs that reflect “international and cross-cultural material.” These phrases capture the colour and atmosphere of an international learning experience. Hence, this thesis deploys the term “internationalization” within the HE context in relation to its impact on the ways in which universities have created promotional media that captures a multicultural university experience. In particular, I am interested in how universities construct the identities of international postgraduate students, the university and the overseas study experience against the backdrop of internationalization.

1.5 The globalization of education and identity

The term globalization has been widely used in various sectors of social and political life to explain how a borderless world is impacting nations across the globe. According to Knight and de Wit (1997, p.6), globalization refers to “the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people [and] ideas … across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way due to a nation’s
individual history, traditions, culture and priorities.” As a result of the confusion that arises between the terms internationalization and globalization, it is useful to consider Marginson’s (1999) definition of globalization. According to Marginson (1999, p.19), globalization refers to “world systems which have a life of their own that is distinct from local national life.” Hence, it is clear from Marginson’s (1999) definition that globalization centres around activities outside individual countries and, as Knight and de Wit (1997, p.6) put it, exists “across borders.” Harman (2005, p.121) also reminds us that “the term globalization is used to refer to systems and relationships that are practised beyond the local and national dimensions at continental, meta-
nation, regional and world levels.” In other words, globalization has wide reaching effects with the potential to change global thinking and actions.

In this thesis, the term globalization is relevant in relation to its impact on the human imagination and consumer behaviour. To examine the effects of globalization on the human imagination, I turn to the work of Arjun Appadurai (1996). In Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Appadurai (1996) underscores the indisputable link between the global media and the human imagination in terms of the individual’s efforts in reinventing oneself. In particular, Appadurai (1996) argues that films and television programmes have a significant impact on the individual’s potential for self-creation. To clarify, Appadurai explains that the impact of the global media on the individual’s imagination is powerful enough to move people across borders in order to experience a new sense of self. He encourages researchers to view the global media and human migration as “interconnected diatrics and [to] explore their joint effects on the work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity.” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) In response to Appadurai’s (1996) call, it is a vital focus of my thesis to investigate the impact of the global media on the international postgraduate student’s sense of self-making and their identities as a result of their contact with HE promotional media. Additionally, I examine the impact of the
global media on constructions of the overseas study experience in HE promotional media specifically aimed at the international postgraduate student market.

In addition to the effects of globalization on the human imagination, the term globalization is relevant to my thesis in relation to its influence on consumer behaviour. In Zygmant Bauman's (1998) *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, observations of the effects of globalization reveal that the people who have access to global mobility are the wealthy elite in society. Bauman (1998) states that these people are valuable to the global economy in that they can make a financial contribution to world economies. This observation of globalization is relevant to my thesis because one of the central concerns of my thesis is in the ways in which international postgraduate student identities are constructed in HE promotional media. In particular, I aim to unpack HE promotional media to observe whether the media content has been created in a manner that privileges the wealthy elite. Additionally, my thesis seeks to ascertain if international postgraduate students themselves have expectations that are coloured by what they view as an exclusive and prestigious overseas study experience.

1.6 Constructing agency

To investigate the overseas study experience of a cohort of international postgraduate students in a Western university, I believe that it is essential to give them the agency to express their views in a visual manner. Therefore, in this thesis, I explore the overseas study experience of international postgraduate students using a novel research tool known as photovoice. Photovoice gives participants a "voice" to express their realities and transfers power into the hands of people whose views would otherwise be unknown (Lorenz 2010). This is done by entrusting people with cameras to capture the realities of their communities with the aim of understanding and exploring issues in order to effect change (Wang and Burris 1997; Streng, Rhodes et al. 2004). In my study, participants were asked to take photographs of their everyday lives using their mobile phone
cameras, thus transferring the power of self-representation to them. As Wang and Burris (1997, p.369) observe, the goals of photovoice are, “to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge (and) to reach policymakers.” Hence, the focus of photovoice is on referring to people as the main source of knowledge about their own communities as opposed to relying on outside sources.

The benefits of using photovoice to examine the construction of agency among participants are numerous. It is a research tool that facilitates the collection of rich data as it allows the researcher to sample a varied range of participant behaviour in different environments (Wang and Burris 1997). This is achieved through “the immediacy of photography and the ability of photos to accurately capture real places, people and events” (Chakraborthy 2009, p.423). Furthermore, as Chakraborthy (2009) observes, the use of cameras is appealing to most people and the submission of photographs portraying the realities of a particular community can result in a sense of pride. The use of photovoice is an empowering mode for participants because they have the opportunity to represent and communicate their group or community concerns in order to achieve better outcomes for them as a whole (Wang and Burris 1997). Consequently, participants in this study were asked to reflect on their issues and concerns so that these considerations could be represented and communicated to a wider audience through the images that they produced.

1.7 Theoretical framework

Media representations of international postgraduate students by the university are deeply insightful as they contribute to establishing and maintaining the ways in which this social group is understood and perceived. Many Western universities are targeting international student markets in Asia, South America and Africa as potential source countries. The correlation between these continents and individual nations as not only part of the developing world but also (for many of them) as former colonies may influence the way potential students are addressed through promotional materials. This study therefore, explores the field of postcolonial theory in its efforts
to better understand the possible discourses being employed by Western universities. From a postcolonial theoretical perspective, this is a social phenomenon which illustrates the ways in which dominant groups have a significant impact on reinforcing accepted roles that are ascribed to those who are less dominant through the use of the mass media (Gramsci 1971). However, as Hall (1986) points out, these dominant discourses can be reshaped through resistance and deconstruction. Hence, it is one of the broad aims of my study to provide alternative perspectives to the depiction of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media by investigating the various identities ascribed to them and exploring the ways in which they view themselves and the overseas study experience. In particular, I discuss the discourses, identities, ideologies and power relations evident in online HE promotional media designed for the international postgraduate student market. In the next chapter, the theoretical background to the thesis will be discussed in depth in order to illustrate the key points behind a postcolonial theoretical framework and highlight the appropriateness of this research paradigm in unpacking the questions posed by my thesis.

The key ideas behind a postcolonial theoretical approach can be derived through an examination of Edward Said’s (1978) seminal work, *Orientalism*, where he argues that the domination of the West (Occident) in the depiction of the East (Orient) was largely the result of hierarchical binaries. The Occident was presented as modern while the Orient was presented as traditional or savage. This juxtaposition further reinforced the idea that the Orient was in need of the civilizing influence of the more knowledgeable Occident. These discourses were largely the result of a history of colonialism and the wide spread influence of Western scholarly perspectives on a global audience. In the light of this, there is a need to consider the postcolonial perspective in deconstructing Western or Eurocentric dominant perspectives. As Said (1978) points out, the postcolonial approach can be viewed as a “way in” to challenge the dominant discourses across a range of activities in society. Following Said, I wish to uncover how a dominant group such as an
academic institution is able to maintain and legitimize their power. I also touch on Spivak’s thoughts of the subaltern and how the voice of the subaltern is often missing or silenced in promotional materials created by Western institutions. Finally, I draw upon Bhabha’s notions of hybridity and the “third space” to examine both the constructed identities of international postgraduate students and how they represent themselves when given the opportunity. According to Bhabha (1994, p. xi), the third space is a space that captures the abundant contradictions of “what it means to survive, to produce, to labour and to create, within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from your country or your people.” Hence, it is a fundamental consideration of this thesis to capture and convey how international postgraduate students negotiate a third space for themselves as a result of the overseas study experience. Additionally, I aim to investigate how these hybrid identities are portrayed in HE promotional media.

Other scholars who have utilized a postcolonial approach to unpack promotional materials in the tourism industry have found that the use of “hierarchical binaries” still pervades these materials. In their analysis of Taiwanese travel guide books, Chang and Holt (1991) discovered that the local Taiwanese were presented as traditional as opposed to their modern visitors who went to Taiwan in search of a “simpler” lifestyle. However, as Chang and Holt (1991) point out, these depictions of the Taiwanese failed to include the modern technological advancements achieved by the country as evidenced in the wide spread use of computers. Consequently, Chang and Holt (1991) surmise that such details were omitted because the tourists who go to Taiwan are seeking a different cultural experience. Therefore, the radicalised stereotype of a country steeped in tradition and free from modern development is further perpetuated.

A postcolonial theoretical approach is particularly useful in addressing contemporary issues, as noted by Quayson (2000), postcolonialism goes beyond the individual histories of
nations to include power imbalances in any context. According to Quayson (2000, p.11), "postcolonialism must be seen as a project to correct the imbalances in the world, and not merely to do with specific 'postcolonial' constituencies." Quayson (2000, p.11) argues that postcolonialism should focus on investigating the dominant discourses and ideologies that impact the world and should strive to bring to surface the perspectives of those who have been marginalized. Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2001, p.15) concur with this by highlighting the fact that dominant discourses still prevail in modern society even though the former colonies have achieved independence. Other scholars such as Banerjee and Prasad (2008, p.92) assert that Western dominance is evident “across a range of activities including specialized scholarship, general thought, as well as institutionalized practices of administration, education, journalism, diplomacy and so on ...”. In a similar vein, my study turns to the field of HE and seeks to unpack the discourses, identities, power relations and ideologies that are embedded within HE promotional media to better understand the ways in which international postgraduate students and the university are represented.

Consistent with Racine and Petrucka’s (2011, p.12) call to “decolonize research”, in my study, I view international postgraduate students as a source of knowledge and I seek to obtain their views in relation to the overseas study abroad experience and their construction of identity. As Racine and Petrucka (2011) observe, the use of the postcolonial approach as a conceptual framework in research design serves to locate research in the everyday lives of people. The benefits of a postcolonial approach as outlined by Racine and Petrucka (2011) is that it is an approach that seeks to understand social phenomena as it is experienced by people, gives a voice to the silenced and provides an analytical lens in which to examine how historical or social relations has positioned people.
1.8 Thesis overview

As mentioned earlier, this thesis is divided into 3 sections comprising of 7 chapters. The first section provides the background and approaches to be used in the study. In this chapter, I have presented the research context and background, the aims of the thesis and issues for consideration and further investigation. In particular, I have highlighted the tensions in media representations of international students and presented a preliminary examination of the arguments of previous scholars identifying the need for extension in existing knowledge, in particular an interrogation into how international postgraduate student identities as well as the institutional identities of universities are being constructed in HE promotional media. Next, in Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical approach underpinning my thesis and review literature that is relevant to the issues that have been highlighted in Chapter 1. Then, in Chapter 3, I discuss the methodological concerns of this thesis. In particular, I present the methodological approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and its relevance to this thesis. I also examine the key analytical concepts in CDA namely, discourse, ideology, power and identity. In my discussion of these analytical concepts, I not only engage with relevant literature but also link these concepts to the ways in which they are applied to this thesis. In addition to these concepts, I discuss the merits of the case study approach to this investigation and expand on the features of photovoice with a particular focus on the role of the research participant. I end this chapter by outlining the data collection procedure and the participant recruitment and selection processes. After this, I proceed to the second section that features 3 analytical chapters. In Chapter 4, I present my data analysis of selected webpages depicting HE promotional media relevant to international postgraduate students. In my discussion, I examine key themes that dominate the university’s efforts to represent its institutional identity within various dimensions of its HE promotional media. I also provide a critical commentary of the findings by drawing on postcolonial theory. Next, in Chapters 5 and 6, I unpack the reflections of international postgraduate students on media representations
of the overseas study experience and their own representations of their immediate realities as international scholars in an Australian university. I achieve this by analysing data consisting of audio files from focus group discussions, participant narratives and photovoice data. I conclude these chapters by analysing the impact of the findings through the lens of postcolonial theory. In the final section, Chapter 7, I summarize the key findings and examine the implications of this study.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundation

2.0 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I presented the background to the study, the aims of the study, the definition of key terms as they are used in this thesis, the context of the argument, a brief outline of the theoretical approach leading to the research methods and concluded with an overview of the thesis. In this chapter, I provide a detailed discussion of the theoretical background that this thesis draws upon to support my argument that the overseas study experience and the identities of international postgraduate students are simplistically portrayed in higher education promotional media. I argue that the use of specific rhetorical strategies and hidden assumptions fulfil the communicative goals of the promotional media genre. I also demonstrate that postcolonial theory offers a relevant and powerful analysis of media constructions of less dominant groups situated within particular communicative settings.

2.1 Postcolonial theory

The discussion on postcolonial theory is presented by addressing the background to the approach and its relevance to research in a variety of fields.

2.1.1 Background

According to the eminent postcolonial scholar, Edward Said (1997), the focus of postcolonial studies is to examine the long standing impact of cultures in contact with a particular emphasis on Western colonial interactions with non-Western countries. Said (1978) points out that one of the main aims of postcolonial studies is to uncover local knowledge that may have been submerged due to the privileging of Western knowledge traditions. Other scholars such as Quayson (2000, p.2) observe that postcolonial theory “involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies as well
as at the level of more general global developments thought to be the after effects of empire.”

This is important because Quayson (2002) alludes to the fact that postcolonial theory offers a critical perspective to the study of social phenomenon particularly issues surrounding power relations between various groups in society. As Quayson (2002) observes, the effects of the colonial encounter did not end with independence. Instead, current social practices which have been established as a result of the colonial encounter such as inherited systems of government, law, media, journalism, business and a range of other interactions are fraught with issues that stem from unequal power relations.

2.1.2 Relevance

Although postcolonial theory has long been applied to the study of literature (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002), it is increasingly being utilized in other areas of study such as management studies (Frenkel 2008; Ozkazanc-Pan 2008). Frenkel (2008) for instance, highlights how knowledge transfer was facilitated by a multinational company through the use of a Western model as the standard. Frenkel (2008) points out that this was conducted at the expense of local knowledge and culture. Besides management studies, a number of other areas of study could potentially benefit from the application of a postcolonial theoretical approach. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002) stress that postcolonial perspectives are increasingly relevant in today’s world in the light of the rapid growth and development of the mass media. This becomes all the more applicable when we consider the significant development and use of contemporary communication platforms such as the Internet. In particular, Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2002, p.11) assert that postcolonial theory could possibly shed light on cultures and contexts that cannot be explained by European theories because European theories operate on the false assumption of “the universal.” They argue that postcolonial theory could possibly offer insights into unearthing the effects of colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002). In addition to that, it could be utilized as a “reading
“strategy” that could provide ideas on how a range of contemporary and historical cultural phenomenon have come into existence (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002, p.11). The rationale for the widespread use and application of postcolonial theory resides in the fact that modern life is by and large shaped and influenced by the colonial past.

Besides literature and management studies, postcolonial theory has also been applied to the investigation of political relationships. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002) observe that in the past, Wales and Scotland were grouped together under the label “United Kingdom” or “Great Britain.” However a postcolonial reading of their historical past has led to new perspectives on their histories and interactions. By taking this approach, issues related to cultural diversity and difference were effectively examined in order to bring to the surface power relations that are embedded in these situations. This in turn has led to self-awareness and the struggle for self-determination and individual identity for many nations that were previously subsumed under the collective banner of a “great” or “united” nation. A clear example of such a case would be the sovereign nations of the former USSR.

From a practical perspective, one can surmise that the aim of postcolonial scholars is to uncover the ways in which influential groups maintain power and perpetuate an ideology of dominance and superiority over marginalized groups. In my view, an interrogation of images and discourses related to minority groups across a range of social activities paves the way towards cultivating a more inclusive relationship. Otherwise, these discourses will continue to reinforce colonial ideas and beliefs. As Said (1978) points out, postcolonial theory serves as a channel to examine the discursive structures permeating all areas of social life. This view is echoed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) who draw our attention to the use of postcolonial theory in diverse disciplines. Hence, it is a relevant theoretical paradigm for a close study of representation in a wide array of fields.
Postcolonial theory has been studied and applied to a range of disciplines by scholars from both the former colonies and Western nations that were previously responsible for the historical period of colonial expansion. Having said that, some scholars like West (1990) are mindful of the position of the postcolonial scholar who is located within the first world academy but studying about the concerns and issues that affect people of non-Western backgrounds. West (1990, p.94) points out that any investigation into marginalized sectors of society places the postcolonial scholar in an awkward position. As West (1990, p.94) comments on postcolonial scholars who are situated in first world academies, “while linking their activities to the fundamental, structural overhaul of these institutions, they often remain financially dependent on them” Hence, postcolonial scholars often find themselves located within a first world Western academy studying about people who are far removed from these contexts while being dependent on the very institutions whose actions and procedures they are examining. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that there has been a change in first world academies where the shift towards supporting postcolonial scholarship emerged and as Spivak (1993, p.56) observes, many institutions located in first world countries encourage scholarship in this area “for institutional validation and certification.” With the onslaught of globalization and the intermingling of cultures, the first world academy can no longer ignore minority groups. Therefore, the postcolonial scholar has a significant role to play in bringing to light the issues and concerns that define and affect the non-dominant communities in society, making postcolonial theory a vital resource in unpacking these social conditions.

2.2 Postcolonial theorists: Said, Spivak and Bhabha

As illustrated before, postcolonial theory offers a range of strategies to unpack the power imbalances that may operate as hidden beliefs and accepted norms in society. In this section, I provide an overview of the key concepts associated with renowned postcolonial theorists in the field.
According to Ozkazanc-Pan (2008), postcolonial theory can be divided and categorized into three distinctive strands. The first strand refers to studies on representation, in particular, how the East is represented by the West in a range of activities in society. Drawing on the work of Said (1978), the aim of this school of thought is to deconstruct images and discourses to reveal how dominant groups in society maintain and legitimize their power.

The second strand in postcolonial theory refers to the notion of the *subaltern* meaning marginalized groups in society and studies utilizing this concept are described as *subaltern studies*. A notable scholar in the field, Spivak (1988) observes that our knowledge of the subaltern is by and large confined to representations created by dominant groups in society who continue to perpetuate the social divide between both groups in order to maintain their power. The significant difference between the first and second strand of postcolonial theory is that *subaltern studies* focuses on particular segments of society rather than referring to minority groups as one general amorphous group. For example, in her work, Spivak (1988) focuses on the status and role of women in post independent India in order to bring to light the injustices perpetuated against them.

The third strand of postcolonial theory draws from the work of Bhabha (1994), who posits that the colonial encounter has resulted in a *hybrid* due to the mixing of values, beliefs and culture between the colonized and colonizer. Bhabha (1994) observes that the colonized occupies a *third space* where there is a negotiation of identity and practices between two opposing worlds. According to Bhabha (1994), this is a productive space and departs from previous views of colonialism. Other scholars such as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2001) concur with Bhabha’s (1994) ideas of the third space. As they observe, “a common view of colonization which represents it as an unmitigated cultural disaster, disregards the often quite extraordinary ways in which colonial societies engaged in and utilized imperial cultures for their own purposes.” Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2001, p.2). They support this position by pointing to the ways in
which some of the former colonies incorporated administrative, legal and educational institutions inherited from the colonial encounter as part of their new independent governments.

In the following sections, I discuss the concepts associated with each strand of postcolonial theory by critically reviewing each theorist’s contributions to scholarship, the criticisms levelled against them and their responses to these opposing views.

2.3 Edward Said

Edward Said is the pioneering scholar in the field of postcolonial studies. According to Bhabha (1992), Said’s seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), launched the postcolonial field. Other scholars such as Spivak (1993, p.56) describe Said’s book as a vital reference in the field where his work “has blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for. It is an important part of the discipline now.” A defining feature of Said’s ideas is his argument that Western representations of the East were based on Western knowledge and stereotypical assumptions. Hence, Said’s theoretical and analytical concepts are beneficial for scholars who are interested in unpacking the hidden assumptions behind representations of particular groups in societies. In the following sections, I discuss Said’s contributions to the postcolonial field by grouping his ideas under the following subheadings: knowledge and power, the discursive strategy of hierarchical binaries and his ideas on representation.

2.3.1 Knowledge and power

One of Said’s main contributions is his idea on Western power and dominance. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1993, p.8) observes that the drive for power by the West originates from a belief system that not only condones the act of dominion over less powerful groups but also supports the ideology “that certain territories and people require and beseech domination.” This belief system is further evidenced in the way in which the West studies the East.
As Said (1978) observes, the West studies the East by “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” Thus, it is a fundamental consideration for postcolonial scholars to unpack these accepted ways of studying and representing the East in order to unearth local knowledge which has been silenced due to accepted ways of being in the world. In my view, it is vital that these ways of being in the world are brought to light and investigated because it has been imposed by the first world on less dominant groups in society.

In his analysis of the ways in which knowledge is constructed, Said (1978) points to the role of academia in subjugating the East into the position of a passive recipient of modernization, education and development by the West. Said (1978) observes that Western academia positions non-Western societies in a role whereby they need to be represented by the West because they are deemed incapable of representing themselves. In doing so, the West is actually legitimizing its role as being more developed and capable. Hence, one of Said’s (1985, p.202) primary concerns is to deconstruct “the muteness imposed upon the Orient as object.” Consistent with this, I argue that media representations of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media have resulted in the silencing of the global researcher. If the global researcher could speak, what would he or she say? Thus, in this thesis, my central concern is to unpack the rich narratives of international postgraduate students alongside the institution’s representations of their identities and the overseas study experience.

It is important to note that Said’s (1978) focus in his book Orientalism is on the inherent power structures that are embedded within commonly held beliefs of what constitutes knowledge and the way that knowledge is constructed, positioned and disseminated. As Said (1978, p.328) observes, “systems of thought like Orientalism, discourses of power, ideological fictions – mind-forg’d manacles – are all too easily made, applied and guarded.” Here, it is evident that one needs to be wary of who is in charge of creating popular notions of what is deemed to be acceptable knowledge because these agents in society not only have the power to create
knowledge but also to decide on the level and range of how that knowledge is to be “applied and guarded” (Said 1978, p.328). He develops this idea further by cautioning that “[i]f the knowledge of Orientalism has any meaning, it is in being a reminder of the seductive degradation of knowledge, of any knowledge, anywhere, at any time” (Said 1978, p.328). This is significant because of the role that knowledge plays in society. Far from being debased at the mercy of the wealthy elite, Said (1978) asserts that knowledge should be utilized to serve society. According to Said (1978,p.30), the role of knowledge is to facilitate the development of society, which he views as “a fundamental human and intellectual obligation.” Here, the spotlight is on the advancement of society and not the manipulation and exploitation of certain segments of society. Said’s insights suggest that it is imperative that popular constructions of knowledge and the representation of various groups in society are brought to light and examined to unshroud whose interests they serve.

2.3.2 Binaries

Publications on the East during the colonial period were structured with a type of discourse Said labelled as Orientalism. This type of discourse constructed the East as being different from the West whereby the point of reference for what was considered the norm was based on Western standards and perceptions. In his view, this type of discourse placed the East as subordinate to the West and revealed an ideology steeped in a perverted sense of superiority over the East. Said (1978) asserts that this imbalance in power relations between the East and West was created by utilizing a structure of hierarchical binaries where opposing qualities between the East and West were brought to the surface. For example, the East was portrayed in relation to the West as old versus new or traditional versus modern. By doing so, the East would always appear as lacking and in need of Western support to achieve similar levels of development and modernity.
Said’s (1978) ideas in relation to binaries has been applied and considered by scholars in a range of disciplines. Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman (2000) expanded on Orientalism to coin the term Tropicalization to refer to descriptions of countries located in temperate and tropical parts of the world. According to Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman (2000), this type of portrayal further consolidates the image of some cultures, in this case those located in tropical countries as being exotic and fairly laid back. On the other hand, cultures located in temperate countries were perceived to be modern, productive and active. In the case of Tropicalization, Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman (2000) were referring to countries in the Caribbean and Latin America. However, in Orientalism, Said (1978) refers to the Orient or the East without making any particular allusion to specific continents. The defining feature of countries situated within the concept of Orientalism is the fact that they have had a history of colonialism.

The use of a structure of hierarchical binaries to represent the East in relation to Western norms still prevails even though the colonial period is over. Postcolonial theory posits that binaries can be detected in all areas of social life, further concretizing the West’s hold on power over other cultures. The use of a structure of hierarchical binaries is commonly visible in fields such as broadcast journalism where Western knowledge systems appear to be privileged over Eastern knowledge systems. For example, Western news organizations such as CNN and BBC are perceived as the standard. However, as Brown (2012) notes, non-Western news organizations such as Al-Jazeera are viewed as suspect by a Western audience. These limited perspectives underscore how the West continues to perpetuate an ideology of superiority over the world at the expense of other ways of thinking and being in the world. This ideology is maintained and strengthened through a structure of hierarchical binaries where one point of view in this case, a Western one is seen as the definitive guide to world events while the non-Western perspective is seen as lacking and in some way deficient. This echoes the work of Mills (2004) who states that colonizing cultures use a structure of hierarchical binaries to construct divisions in
relation to the level of progress achieved by the former colonies. Here, Mills (2004, p.99) refers to the work of Fabian (1983) to highlight the popular technique of labelling the former colonies as “developing country” or “pre-industrial” to emphasize that these countries are locked in the past and have failed to achieve the same level of progress as the West.

2.3.3 Representation

According to Said (1983, p.4), texts do not exist in isolation but are “worldly, to some degree they are events, and even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted.” This has great implications for the study of a range of texts operating as part of social discourse in a wide variety of fields such as education, advertising, finance and other relevant circles. An exploration of the images and discourses prevalent in texts of a promotional nature such as brochures, print and online media could potentially reveal the motivations for the ways in which people are “located and interpreted” in those communicative settings. Many postcolonial scholars echo this outlook in relation to the uncloaking of power balances in texts. For example, Loomba (1998) suggests that postcolonial theory can be applied to the interpretation of various social contexts by unpacking the discourses used in order to investigate how power structures are maintained. Other scholars such as Gandhi (1998) have observed that one of the strategies adopted to manage power structures in social representation is by expanding or decreasing the level of representation accorded to particular groups in society.

In his writings on representation in colonial discourse, Said (1978) observes that native populations were portrayed as primitive to reinforce the idea that the British were a modern, developed culture. These images and discourses were used and spread far and wide across the empire to justify the view that the colonial enterprise was valid and even necessary. Hence, racial
stereotypes and accounts of the civilizing influence of the empire upon the “savage” natives were perpetuated unhindered in colonial archives. As Said (1978, p.20) observes,

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text; this location includes the kind of narrative he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kind of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text – all of which add up to the deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient and finally representing it or speaking on its behalf.

In order to understand what colonial discourse is, I turn to the work of Mills (2004, p.95) who states that colonial discourse goes beyond similar content in texts to encapsulate “a set of practices and rules which produced those texts and the methodological organization and thinking underlying them.” Here, Mills (2004) echoes Said in Orientalism (1978) when he points to the fact that colonial texts were steeped in a particular world view that originated from the belief that native populations were inferior to that of the colonizer. Hence, the texts that were produced at that time reflected those very beliefs.

In her clarification of the role of discourse in the textual representations of various groups in society, Mills (2004, p.15) draws on the work of Foucault (1972) to state that discursive constructions originate from “the systematicity [sic] of ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and believing.” From this, one can surmise that the key point here is in defining the contexts in which the participants of a particular communicative setting operate. Hence, these contexts or “discursive frameworks” (Mills 2004, p.16) set out the parameters in which participants can negotiate their roles. Consistent with this, a vital focus of my thesis is to unpack the ways in which the university as an institution ascribes roles to international students and itself as an institution of higher learning in HE promotional media. In my view, an investigation into these frameworks is useful in uncovering the remnants of “practices and rules” from the colonial period that pervades all areas of modern social interactions. To illuminate her point further, Mills (2004, p.10) asserts that
... a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence. Institutions and social contexts therefore play an important role in the development and maintenance and circulation of discourses.

Thus, it is clear that when institutions are representing people from other cultures in a range of media, the guiding principles in relation to their selection of images and discourses is based on the knowledge that they, as the representer have about the represented. In the case of HE promotional media, the representer being the university relies heavily on its perceptions of international students. Some scholars like Devos (2003) and Haugh (2008) have argued that these representations are predominantly based on a deficit formula. I concur with this view as it is clear to me, based on a perusal of HE promotional media such as websites and printed brochures that universities are portrayed from the perspective of prestige and power, glorifying the host nation as modern and developed. In my view, the unwritten message to international students who come in contact with these promotional media is that their realities are in opposition to what they are seeking in an overseas study experience. This corresponds with the observations of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995, p.59) who state that knowledge of the Orient “in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental and his world.” Thus, knowledge of the represented creates the represented in the minds of all who come in contact with the discourses and images of the represented.

In her analysis of the ways in which native populations are represented, Mills (2004) highlights the discursive strategy of reinforcing the idea of homogeneity among colonial populations using the third person pronoun. Here, Mills (2004) refers to the work of Fabian (1983, p.83) who observes that: “Pronouns and verb forms in the third person mark an Other outside the dialogue. He (she or I) is not spoken to but posited (predicated) as that which contrasts with the personness of the participants in the dialogue.” Here, both Mills (2004) and Fabian (1983) bring to light the popular strategy used by dominant groups to paint minority groups with the stereotypical
reference consisting of the third person “them” as if every person in the group is the same. Furthermore, by dislocating marginalized groups from the mainstream, the powerful elite not only manage to demonize them as something other than normal but also, as Fabian (1983) points out, cut off any opportunity for meaningful dialogue and interaction.

In her application of Said’s (1978) ideas on representation, Mills (2004) cites an extract from Baikie’s *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue* (1856) to reveal how colonial texts from that era painted colonized people as homogeneous and even likened them to animals. The aim was to highlight the fact that colonized people were all alike and more importantly, that they existed at a level that was below that of the colonizer:

*People came out of the huts to gaze at the apparition, and standing at the doors of their abodes were, without the smallest exaggeration, immersed nearly to their knees, and one child in particular I observed up to its waist. How the interiors of the huts of these amphibious creatures were constructed I cannot conjecture but we saw dwellings from which if inhabited, the natives must have dived like beavers to get outside.*” (Mills 2004, p.11)

Here, Mills (2004) points out that the local people of the region were described as almost less than human without the possibility of ever being equal to Baikie and his team of explorers. This accentuates the view that the point of reference for acceptable standards of development and progress was the Western model offered by Baikie and his group. The local people of the area had no voice in the representation of their population and the unsuspecting reader has no opportunity to conceptualize them as anything more than the images that have been presented to them.

While the examples of representation presented above are located during the colonial period, the ongoing effects of colonial discourse prevail today. This is evident in the way various ethnic and social groups are depicted in modern communication platforms such as the television and more recently, the Internet. Commenting on media portrayals of the Middle East and Islam, Said (1978, p.287) states:
In newsreels or news-photos, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures. Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of jihad. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world.

Although Said made his observations in 1978, we still contend with slanted representations of minority groups and people who appear different from the widely Western-controlled media. The implicit and sometimes not so implicit message serves to accentuate the “us versus them” discourse and to further separate people based on difference and thus create suspicion and distrust among people.

2.3.4 Criticisms and response

In this section, I discuss the primary criticisms directed towards Said and some of his responses as well as the responses of renowned scholars in the field of postcolonial studies to these reproofs. I have structured my discussion by grouping the key issues that critics have lambasted Said for, namely his ideas on investigating the Orient, the position of the scholar and disciplinary boundaries.

2.3.4.1 Investigating the Orient

The primary criticism of Said’s work is whether his ideas about the Orient can be accepted as objective because the people of the Orient are mired in a long standing historical and economic relationship with the colonizing Occident. As such, their voices may not be wholly represented in any Western academic analysis of their realities (Banerjee 2000). In response, Said (1985, p.90) argues that academia has been historically reluctant to address what he refers to as “the problems of Orientalism in the political or ethical or even epistemological contexts proper to it.” He contends that this disinclination to examine the concerns of the Orient emphasizes the very need to launch an investigation into the problems of the Orient. Said’s (1985) retort to his critics who question his examination and interpretation of East-West interactions is that all interactions
are open to interpretation similar to a literary text. For example, he offers the illustration of the works of Shakespeare which is open to individual scholarly viewpoints. He asserts that a literary text:

... is commonly supposed to gain some of its identity from its historical moment interacting with the attentions, judgements, scholarship and performance of its readers. But, I discovered that this privilege was rarely allowed the Orient, the Arabs, or Islam, which separately or together were supposed by mainstream academic thought to be confined to the fixed status of an object frozen once and for all in time by the gaze of Western percipients. (Said 1985, p.92)

Here, Said (1985) emphasizes the fact that while it is commonly acceptable for academia to provide varying opinions on literary texts, the same level of debate and discussion is denied to the Orient. He argues that historically, Western scholars have relegated the Orient to a static position, grounded and buried under their skewed interpretations of the subject.

2.3.4.2 The position of the scholar

In addition to questions on Said’s approach to the connection between language and power, another criticism that has been levelled against him surrounds his views on the location of the intellectual when examining a text. Scholars such as Moore-Gilbert (1997) comment that in *Orientalism*, Said comes across as inconsistent when he discusses the location of the critic of any text. As Moore-Gilbert (1997) points out, Said rejects the idea that the critic should sit outside the text because he is close to the very subjects he critiques. In response to criticisms on the location of the scholar, Said (1985) has stated that he occupies the space of an exile. Hence, he is able to draw on his own personal experience to illuminate his ideas, giving them depth and validity. Similarly, other scholars such as Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2009, p.68) assert that the value of Said’s ideas reside in the fact that his thoughts on the “orientalised experience” are not presented from a vague “theoretical position” but convey the personal, ongoing experiences of people.
Another criticism directed towards Said comes from Lewis (1982) who challenges Said’s knowledge of scholarship and even his role as a scholar. The main points of contention for Lewis (1982) are what he sees as deficiencies in Said’s knowledge of Orientalist disciplines and his lack of expertise in Arab history. In response, Said critiques scholars such as Lewis stating that they are clear examples of those who continue to perpetuate the very representations that he sought to expose through his work. In his influential work, *Orientalism*, Said (1978, p.3) observed that the West was responsible for acting like a “corporate institution” in the way it approached the Orient “by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.” Here, we can see from the manner in which Lewis (1982) approaches Said’s ideas, he takes on the very role of the Western academic who imposes his “authorizing views” upon a scholar who approaches a topic that has been studied by mainstream Western academia from a deficiency model. Hence, he questions Said and the very ideas that he presents. As Said (1985, p.6) asserts, “[for] unrestrained anti-intellectuals, unencumbered by critical self-consciousness, no one has quite achieved the sublime confidence of Bernard Lewis.”

Besides Lewis (1982), other critics such as Porter (1982) argue that Said’s views on colonial discourse as a formidable power that obliterates resistance of any kind is questionable because it discredits any form of local defiance. In fact, Porter (1982) cautions that Said’s thoughts have left us with a legacy of viewing colonial discourse as “not only what we have but all we can ever have.” Here, Porter (1982) insists that Said’s approach to colonial discourse in *Orientalism* fails to consider the agency and voices of colonized people whose opinions have been subsumed under the all-consuming power of colonial discourse. In other words, Porter (1982) alerts us to the fact that Said challenges colonial discourse without offering any insights into local resistance. In their analysis of these criticisms, Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2009, p.73) declare that Porter (1982) fails to take into account Said’s view of the role of the scholar which is, “to oppose” because, as they point out, a scholar “does not need to provide an alternative for the
critique to be effective and valid.” This is important because Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2009) offer a valid point in that Said's observations of colonial discourse from the past up to the present is a significant contribution in that it exposes complex systems of thought and behaviour which is manifested through the choice of particular words and images that function to reinforce these ideologies. As Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2009, p.73) maintain:

All representations may be mediated, but the simple assertions of Orientalism remain: that power determines which representations may be accepted as “true”, that Orientalist texts owe their alleged “truthfulness” to their location in the discourse, and that this situation is one that emerges out of, and confirms, a global structure of imperial domination.

While Said’s thoughts on colonial discourse uncloak the inherent power that is embedded within the discourse and omit any reflections on local resistance, the next strand of postcolonial theorists led by Spivak (1993) expands on Said's ideas by directing their attention to people who have been affected by the colonial encounter. Hence, Spivak (1993) and other subaltern studies scholars shift the focal point of colonial texts from an analysis of colonial discourse to the voices of the colonized in their examination of colonial texts.

2.3.4.3 Disciplinary boundaries

In addition to issues surrounding scholarship, Said’s detractors also argue that Orientalism fails to set out disciplinary boundaries because Said’s ideas echo Foucauldian thoughts and Marxist ideas, never quite satisfying either camps (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2009). In response, Moore-Gilbert (1997) points out that there are clear distinctions between the work of Said and that of Foucault. Even though Said borrows from Foucault in relation to his ideas on the definition of power and how it functions in society, Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.37) observes that Said’s notions of power are clearly steeped in the belief that Western control and rule over the East stems from “a conscious and purposive process governed by the will and intention of individuals as well as by institutional imperatives.” In contrast, Moore-Gilbert (1997) asserts that Foucault views power as
a hidden social entity consisting of an elaborate labyrinth of agents, all working together to advance its interests. In Foucault’s notion of power, Moore-Gilbert (1997) states that “individuals-authors included are only ever functions of the systems within which they operate, not the sovereign agents conceived of in traditional humanism.” This is significant because Moore-Gilbert (1997) highlights a key difference between Said’s conceptions of power versus that of Foucault. To Said, the West’s imposition of power on the East was a conscious process that was well thought out and executed. However, Foucault’s perceptions of power point to the implicit forces at work within society consisting of a complex network of participants ranging from governments to writers who work tacitly to establish and maintain power. Therefore, it is clear that there are clear disciplinary boundaries between Said and Foucault.

Although Said has been criticised for his ideas on the link between knowledge and power, Moore-Gilbert (1997) notes that his detractors acknowledge that he has made significant contributions through *Orientalism*. According to Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.36), one of Said’s fundamental contributions is his focus on “the political and material effects of Western scholarship and academic institutions and their affiliations to the world outside them.” Here, Moore-Gilbert (1997) explains that Said’s analysis of East-West exchanges has directed our attention to the way knowledge and power are inextricably connected. Moore-Gilbert (1997) maintains that Said, through his rejection of Western liberal humanistic ideas of seeking knowledge for its own sake, has brought to the surface the fundamental idea that the West’s pursuit of knowledge is one that is motivated by the propagation of particular ideologies.

### 2.4 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Born in India and currently residing in the United States, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak features prominently as one of the leading scholars in postcolonial studies under the *subaltern studies*
group. Scholars in the *subaltern studies* group differ from Edward Said in that they are focussed on the experiences of colonized people as opposed to the actions of the colonizer. According to Smith (2002), the term *subaltern* was used during British colonial times to address low ranking military officers but it has now been used by academia to engage in studies of groups that have been subjugated by the colonizer. As Sarkar (2012, p.55) observes, the subaltern encompasses “women, children, colonial subjects, the poor, the illiterate, the proletariat or the religious ethnic minority.” In his analysis of *subaltern studies*, Sarkar (2012, p.55) traces its origins to 1982 when, as he puts it, “a collective of South Asian scholars in Britain especially Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabourthy, initiated publication of a book titled Subaltern Studies.” However, of all the *subaltern studies* scholars, Sarkar (2012) asserts that Spivak is most renowned because she highlights the fundamental component of the subaltern identity which is the systematic silencing of the subaltern.

Spivak is internationally acknowledged for her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) which is considered a defining text in the field of *subaltern studies* because it encapsulates her thoughts on the life of the subaltern, in this case, the representation of Indian women in colonial archives and the ways in which they are portrayed through the eyes of the colonizer, leaving no room for self-representation. Next to Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), Maggio (2007, p.419) asserts that Spivak’s illustrious essay, is “probably the most influential work in the field of postcolonial theory.” One of the reasons for the popularity of Spivak’s work is the fact that it has impacted diverse disciplines with the key message that the colonizer failed to comprehend the experiences of the colonized in colonial discourse (Maggio 2007). In short, the distinguishing feature between the arguments in Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and Spivak’s celebrated essay is that Spivak’s focus is on the experiences of native populations which have long been suppressed as opposed to concentrated attention and study of the injustices of the colonizer. Through Spivak’s work, the spotlight has shifted towards the people of colonial territories and their right to self-determination.
Besides the push to reclaim indigenous voices in colonial texts, another vital contribution by Spivak (1985) is her observation of the link between feminism and the discursive strategies employed in colonial texts. In particular, Spivak (1981) alerts us to the long standing historical relationship between colonialism and the subjugation of women through the use of masculine literary forms and the ways in which these modes of communication have permeated Western academia today. As Spivak (1981, p.156) observes, “The point I am trying to make is that, in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman.” This is important because Spivak (1981) underscores the inadequacy of these masculine literary forms and concepts employed by Western female academics to convey the colonized woman’s experience. Thus, Spivak’s arguments highlight a key similarity between feminist theory and postcolonial theory in that it functions as “a political project, to raise and transform consciousness” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002, p.174).

In the following sections, I discuss Spivak’s contributions to the postcolonial field by grouping her ideas under the following subheadings: knowledge and power, othering, counter-discourse, deconstruction, the position of the subaltern scholar and the criticisms levelled against her ideas.

2.4.1 Knowledge and power

While there are obvious differences between the work of Said and Spivak as mentioned above, Maggio (2007) observes that the ideas of both scholars converge when Spivak (1999) claims that she too, aims to unearth the way in which knowledge that was constructed by the powerful served to concretize the subjugation of the subaltern. In her commentary on Western scholarship, Spivak (1999) asserts that Western academia has had a role to play in the silencing of minorities because the subaltern has been created and to a certain extent, fixed by Western academic
perspectives. As Spivak (1999, p.208) puts it, “I think it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting, in order precisely to be more effective in the long run.” Here, Spivak concurs that the West had relegated the subaltern to a place of silent immobility in order to achieve its lofty ambitions during the period of colonization.

Spivak's (1999) views on knowledge can be examined through an assessment of her ideas on the limitations of theoretical knowledge as a tool that could provide an explanation for social phenomenon. According to Spivak (1999), the subaltern will not obtain any discernible benefits from lengthy deliberations in relation to theoretical considerations of their fate. Instead of a prolonged focus on theory, Spivak's ideas on knowledge emphasize fundamental questions in relation to “the role of the academy and whether there is a liberating place for the intellectual desires of studying the subaltern.” (Maggio 2007, p.420) This is important because Spivak points to the importance of identifying the goals of academia in pursuing knowledge. In order to obtain greater clarity of these goals, it is beneficial to ascertain the intellectual function and aims of the subaltern scholar's pursuit of knowledge. This can be derived by examining where Spivak situates herself as subaltern scholar. According to Mills (2004, p.109), Spivak situates herself “within deconstruction and Marxism” and her goal is to shine the spotlight “… on the possibility of alternative voices being recoverable within discourses which seem on the surface to be simple colonial texts …” Hence, it is clear that Spivak’s work extends Said’s ideas on knowledge and power with a view to reclaim the voices of those who have been silenced due to simplistic assumptions by Western academia.

Another fundamental difference between Said and Spivak is her contribution to the field of teaching and learning. As Moore-Gilbert (1997) observes, a prime concern of Spivak’s as evidenced in her prominent essay, “How to Teach a Culturally Different Book?” (1991) examines the predicament of teaching texts that contain colonial discourse while trying to limit the transfer of values associated with the colonizer’s perceptions of native populations. Spivak’s (1991)
critiques on the intermingling of politics and pedagogy has led her to call for greater inclusion of writing by non-Western authors at university level. As Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.77) observes,

In more recent writing, Spivak elaborates a number of ways in which what she calls genuinely ‘transnational study of culture’ can be facilitated, particularly at the postgraduate level, suggesting measures as diverse as phasing out of single-author studies, broadening the range of language requirements to include non-Western languages, greater attention to non-literary media and ‘popular’ cultural forms and integrating critical theory more effectively into postcolonial studies.

In her writing on the ways in which knowledge is constructed and disseminated, Spivak (1991) discusses the connection between economic supremacy and how knowledge is structured in a manner that privileges the economies of the former colonies in a global arena. According to Spivak (1991), one can see neo-colonialism at work in the ways in which the policy of the colonizer has shifted from militarily acquiring territories to gaining economic supremacy over other nations. Here, Spivak (1991) highlights the West’s scramble for economic power in a post-Second World War global platform. One of the ways in which Spivak observes the practice of neo-colonialism at work internationally is through the restructuring of the economies of the former colonies. For example, Spivak (1991, p.2) notes that, “[with] neo-colonialism comes the idea of a Third World ... where people wanted the global monetary policy of a handful of nations to be different so that the newly independent countries could have a different deal.” This is significant because Spivak (1991) illustrates what she perceives as a tacit strategy on the part of wealthy nations in the production of knowledge about the economic and financial status of the former colonies.

Besides Spivak’s interpretation of the ways in which the West maintains economic supremacy over the former colonies, Moore-Gilbert (1997) states that another vital contribution of Spivak’s is her commentary of a discursive strategy in colonial texts that she refers to as “worlding.” In this strategy, Moore-Gilbert (1997) notes that Spivak highlights the colonial act of
constructing territorial landscapes out of indigenous land according to the discernment of the colonizer. Here, Moore-Gilbert (1997) indicates that the colonizer carved out geographical parameters within nations without consulting the local constituents of the land. The danger of such an act, according to Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.79) is “the way that the local population was in turn ‘persuaded’ to substitute that version of reality for its own modes of understanding and structuring its social world.” This ‘persuasion’ was not always consensual as evidenced in a number of trouble spots around the world where territorial disputes stretching from colonial times to the present day still prevails with no end in sight. For example, the ongoing skirmishes between the Palestinians and Israelis over the Gaza strip and the clashes in Kashmir between the Pakistanis and the Indians are just two cases to point. The process of “worlding” whether explicitly or implicitly conducted, still thrives and native populations are coaxed and coerced to accept these conditions or face lengthy conflicts until they accept the terms and conditions for the continuity of their very existence.

2.4.2 Othering

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002, p.96) state that a vital contribution of Spivak’s (1985) is her identification of a discursive strategy known as “othering” which brings to surface some of the colonial processes at work in texts. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002, p.96) illustrate, “These include the assumption of authority, ‘voice’ and control of the ‘word’, that is, seizure and control of the means of interpretation and communication. In many post-colonial texts this is done by means of a ‘rewriting’ of canonical stories.” Here, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002, p.96) extend their illustration by citing the example of the Canadian novelist, Timothy Findley (1984), who, in his novel Not Wanted on the Voyage, rewrites the canonical tale of “Noah and the Great Flood” from the perspective of Western civilization and progress at the expense of “[other] developments.” As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002, p.97) point out, “the ‘rise’ of any culture is not just coincident
with the demise of other forms and possibilities, it involves the active suppression and/or annihilation of forms of "Otherness." It closes off alternative tropes and modes." This is significant because Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002, p.97) indicate that the “othering” of minority groups blocks the possibility of other “tropes” or metaphors that capture alternative realities. Here, it is important to note that the concept of “tropes” in postcolonial theory goes beyond literary metaphors because, as Spurr (1993, p.4) points out, even non-fiction writing, “despite conventional expectation, depend on the use of myth, symbol, metaphor, and other rhetorical procedures more often associated with fiction and poetry” to express profound ideas. In postcolonial theory, “tropes” are used when theorists refer to contemporary symbols and motifs to develop complex ideas about social phenomenon. For example, Bhabha (1994, p.4) indicates that he developed his ideas on “cultural hybridity” from his observations of the work of the African-American artist, Renee Green whose depiction of a stairwell in an art gallery as a liminal space prompted Bhabha (1994, p.4) to state:

The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.

Here, Bhabha (1994) discusses his interpretation of an art work that led him to his ideas of the subject position occupied by individuals whose identities have been impacted by the colonial encounter. Thus, in Bhabha’s (1994) view, the literal concept of “cultural hybridity” emerged from the symbolism of art as it adequately captures and illuminates the real-world experiences of particular groups of people.

2.4.3 Counter-discourse

Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.75) points out that a key difference between Said and Spivak is her focus on what he refers to as “counter-discourse.” Unlike Said, whose arguments were directed towards the unveiling of the destructive effects of colonial texts in relation to the ways in which the Orient
was portrayed, Spivak concentrates on the native people who inhabit these colonial texts. For example, some of Spivak’s outstanding work in the recovery and presentation of these silenced voices can be found in her “analysis and translation of local literatures such as the Bengali-language fiction of Mahasweta Devi.” (Moore Gilbert 1997, p.75). Other examples can be found in her efforts to present the voices of local people as an alternative to hegemonic colonial texts as evidenced in her work such as “The Rani of Simur” (1985) where Spivak asserts that India cannot be viewed as representative of the Orient. This is important because it signals a radical shift from Said’s arguments of the Orient as being representative of the collective colonial experience. Instead, as Spivak (1985) points out, there are differences in the colonial encounter and each experience is unique to particular nations and to the people of those regions. By acknowledging the diversity in the colonial experience, Spivak argues that individual experiences of colonization can and should be recognized and honoured. This point is illustrated by Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.76) who presents the example of distinct colonial experiences such as that of “migrants to the metropolis and postcolonial subjects who remain in the Third World.” and “the export of slaves before 1850.” It is evident that in both of these examples, there appears to be a lack of self-representation in the portrayal of the people who were caught up in a series of tumultuous events beyond their control. However, as unsuspecting readers, our perceptions of these “migrants”, “postcolonial subjects” and “slaves” remain unquestioned as we accept the skewed representations defined through the eyes of the colonizer.

2.4.4 Deconstruction

In her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak (1988, p.104) mentions that she perceives Jacques Derrida’s ideas on deconstruction to be beneficial in studying contexts outside the First World. According to Smith (2002), Spivak was one of the pioneering scholars who translated Jacques Derrida’s work into English. Other scholars such as Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.84) note that Spivak applies Derrida’s ideas to unpack “the assumptions, strategies and rhetoric through which
a given narrative, whether political, literary, historical or theoretical is grounded and mediated.”

Here, Moore-Gilbert (1997) draws attention to the strategy used by Spivak to uncloak the hidden agenda of texts. Although Spivak had a penchant for revealing the illogical or faulty notions of such texts, Moore-Gilbert (1997) observes that she omits to offer any alternative interpretations or ways to address these perceived deficiencies in the texts under examination.

Besides the unpacking of hidden schemas, Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.85) states that Spivak views deconstruction as a channel to “generate awareness of – and, possibly help in the liberation (or ‘coming to voice’) of excluded or marginalized social constituencies.” This is important because Moore-Gilbert (1997) points to a key feature in Spivak’s ideas which is to unearth that which was excluded in colonial texts, in this case, the voice of the subaltern. Hence, to Spivak, the strategy of deconstruction allows the postcolonial scholar to expose and salvage that which was concealed by society’s powerful elite.

In addition to revealing the buried voices of the subaltern, Spivak also uses deconstruction “to subvert the systems of binaries on which dominant discourses characteristically rely to legitimize their power” (Moore-Gilbert 1997, p.85). Here, Moore-Gilbert (1997) states that Spivak discloses the potential for deconstruction to question the status quo created by binaries. For example, the juxtaposition of the traditional East next to the modern West can be unpacked utilizing the strategy of deconstruction to ascertain whether such depictions are in fact accurate or not. As Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.85) surmises, Spivak “advocates the modes of ‘negotiation’ and ‘critique’ which unsettle the dominant from within.” It is important to note that the twin strategies of ‘negotiation’ and ‘critique” are paramount to Spivak’s approach in working with colonial texts in order to emancipate the voices of the subaltern.

Besides the areas mentioned above, Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.85) also notes that Spivak applies Derrida’s ideas on deconstruction to great influence in her “definitions of identity and the
role of the investigating subject.” Here, Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.85) points out that Spivak borrows Derrida’s ideas of “the decentred subject” meaning that in Spivak’s view, the subject or self must be understood not as innate or given, but as constructed discursively and therefore, as inevitably “decentred.” The reason for this, as Spivak observes are the complex interactions between author and reader in texts. As Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.86) points out, when readers and writers intersect, there is “the inevitable multiplicity of subject-positions with which textuality inscribes both author and reader and by extension, the subject in general” (Moore-Gilbert, 1997, p.86). In short, Spivak’s view on the identity of the subject is one that is fluid taking into account the effects of history and politics upon individual nations. To illustrate this idea, Spivak cites several examples of subject identities that were conceptualized by foreign elements as a result of circumstances that were beyond the control of those native populations. As Spivak (1993, p.211) states, “[names] like “Asian” or “Africa” or “Madhuban” or “Nago” or “Zavrugo” or “Warputali” are not anchored in identities. They are incessant fields of recoding that secure identities.” Here, Spivak (1993) suggests that the colonial encounter has resulted in the reworking of native identities according to the perceptions of the colonizer. This idea is further consolidated by Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.86) who argues that these imposed identities flourish in colonial discourse as evidenced in the concept of the “native savage” in representations of indigenous populations in colonial texts. One of the main arguments in favour of this appears to be a longing on the part of the colonizer to create a colonial subject who represents qualities that are different from the colonizer, thus positioning the colonized subject as the foreign Other.

2.4.5 The subaltern scholar

In addition to Spivak’s contribution on how the identities of native populations are transmuted by the colonial encounter, Spivak (1993) also comments on the identity of a scholar undertaking postcolonial research. As Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.86) observes, Spivak “dismisses the argument that only the postcolonial subject can address the subject of postcoloniality, a perspective which
she dismisses as 'nativism' or 'reverse ethnocentrism.' This is a vital point as Spivak highlights the fact that a postcolonial scholar from the Third World does not by virtue of birth, have special insight into the colonial experience. Hence, to Spivak, the postcolonial scholar needs to work within Western academic traditions encompassing Western critical theory to unpack the colonial encounter and reveal the ensuing resistance conveyed by indigenous voices.

In her commentary on the subaltern scholar, it is interesting to note that Spivak’s thoughts on the position of the postcolonial scholar vary from that of Said’s. As Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.78) points out, “In contrast to what is sometimes implied in Orientalism, Spivak rejects the idea that there is an uncontaminated space outside the modes and objects of analysis, to which the postcolonial critic has access by virtue of ‘lived experience’ or cultural origin.” Here, Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.78) states that the running theme in Spivak’s arguments is that the scholar has to “negotiate” with “Western cultural institutions, texts, values and theoretical practices rather than outwardly reject them as was evidenced in the work of Said. In practical terms, as Mills (2004, p.107) observes, Spivak illustrates the role of the subaltern scholar as one that involves examining documents with the express aim “to analyse discursive structures as much for what they exclude as for what they determine.” This indicates that the position of the subaltern scholar is to retrieve the silenced voices of the subaltern as evidenced in the work of Spivak. For example, in her commentary on the representation of Indians in colonial texts, Spivak (1993) notes that it is the upper class Brahmins who are portrayed at the expense of the majority native population. (Mills 2004) Thus, through her careful analysis of the representation of the native Indian population in colonial texts, Spivak draws our attention to the fact that in the portrayal of one segment of the population, another segment has been conveniently omitted. Mills (2004, p.107) extends this idea by pointing out that it is the unrepresented “indigenous voices” that concern Spivak and other subaltern studies scholars.
Besides Spivak, other scholars such as Dutta and Pal (2010) view the role of the subaltern scholar as one that is of a dual nature. On the one hand, they see the scholar as tacit in the silencing of subaltern voices but on the other hand, there is the potential for the scholar to work with minority groups to champion their concerns. As Dutta and Pal (2010, p.369) observe, the scholar is complicit in the annihilation of subaltern voices through what they see as “co-optic dialogic exercises framed within the disciplinary boundaries of areas such as anthropology, ethno-botany and geography deployed in the service of neo-liberalism.” This is an important point because Dutta and Pal (2010) point to the way in which the clinical practices of research and scholarship seeks to obtain hard data in a variety of fields without necessarily comprehending local customs and practices. As a result of this practice, they suggest, as does Spivak (1999) that academia has implicitly played a role in silencing local populations.

While the silencing of local knowledge flourishes in research that is data driven as indicated above, Dutta and Pal (2010) concede that the subaltern scholar also has the power to move from a position of information gatherer to that of co-contributor in facilitating the emancipation of the subaltern. As Dutta and Pal (2010, p. 369) observe, the subaltern scholar can engage in what they see as “transformative politics by sincerely seeking to engage in dialog with subaltern voices such that these voices might be heard amidst the colonizing structures of neoliberalism.” Here, Dutta and Pal (2010) reveal the influential role that the subaltern scholar could potentially play in working together with marginalized groups in society to communicate and transform their immediate realities. This echoes Spivak’s (1999) views whereby she observes that theoretical knowledge on the status of the subaltern is pointless unless it leads to positive outcomes that serve to reclaim their suppressed voices. By doing so, the subaltern then has the opportunity to rewrite the predominant messages attributed to stereotypical representations of themselves and their lives. In their final analysis, Dutta and Pal (2010) note that the two-dimensional nature of the subaltern scholar which is to describe the ongoing lives of marginalized
people and to also provide a medium or channel to greater awareness of their conditions could potentially offer these groups the opportunity to redefine their future.

2.4.6 Criticisms and response

In this section, I discuss the primary criticisms directed towards Spivak and some of the responses of renowned scholars in the field of postcolonial studies to these observations. I have structured my discussion by grouping the key issues that critics have faulted Spivak for, namely her inaccessibility to readers and her lack of focus due to her engagement with a multitude of theoretical approaches.

2.4.6.1 Inaccessibility to readers

In his commentary on Spivak’s book, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999), Eagleton (1999, p.3) labels Spivak’s work as “pretentiously opaque.” Eagleton (1999) explains that while postcolonial theorists such as Spivak take it upon themselves to champion the rights of the marginalized, they fail to make their writing comprehensible to the reader of their texts. As Eagleton (1991, p.3) observes,

> Postcolonial theory makes heavy weather of a respect for the Other, but its most immediate Other, the reader is apparently dispensed from this sensitivity. Radical academics, one might naively have imagined, have a certain political responsibility to ensure that their ideas win an audience outside senior common rooms.

Here, Eagleton (1991, p.3) draws attention to the way that Spivak focuses on providing exceptional theoretical insights on literary texts minus any coherent discussion of “their language, form or style.” For example, Eagleton (1991) points out that Spivak provides an in depth critique of “Charlotte Bronte and Mary Shelley, Jean Rhys and Mahasweta Devi” but her discussion is nothing more than what he sees as “good old-fashioned content analysis.” As a result of taking this vague writing approach, Eagleton (1991) laments that Spivak fails to examine the actual
literary style utilized by these eminent writers, resulting in mere “content analysis” without the added value of rich literary insights.

In response to Eagleton’s (1991) criticisms, Wright (2002) asserts that it is presumptuous of Eagleton (1991) to assume that he knows who Spivak’s readers are. According to Wright (2002, p.71), Spivak, by virtue of birth is both “the Outsider looking in and the Insider looking out.” Therefore, Spivak possess adequate knowledge about the paradoxical nature of postcolonial theory whereby those who need access to it may not necessarily have exposure to her work while those who sit outside the colonial experience and have access to her work but may not understand the ideas that are discussed. In fact, Wright (2002, p.71) goes so far as to say that these disparaging remarks underscore the very fact that Eagleton fails to comprehend a vital feature of postcolonial theory which is the reality that not everyone has “the privilege of speaking” and not everyone has “access to hearing.” Wright’s (2002) observations echo Said’s (1985) comments about how the inaccessibility of the non-Western academic’s work is the very reason that studies about the colonial experience are necessary. Otherwise, these invaluable insights would be lost.

2.4.6.2 Multitude of theories

In addition to these comments, Eagleton (1991) also bemoans the fact that Spivak draws on a range of theorists to illuminate her work but these references lack focus, making her writing impenetrable to the reader. In Eagleton’s (1991) view, Spivak’s overzealous approach to embedding a multitude of theoretical orientations in her work suggests a lack of focus in relation to her own theoretical orientation. As Eagleton (1991, p.4) notes, “As feminist, deconstructionist, post-Marxist and post-colonialist together, Spivak seems reluctant to be left out of any theoretical game in town.” Here, Eagleton (1991) fails to comprehend Spivak’s position as a subaltern scholar whereby she situates herself across a range of theoretical paradigms. Therefore, in
conveying her ideas from such a diverse theoretical base, Spivak may at times come across as vague and her writing appears challenging to the reader.

In response to Eagleton’s (1991) criticisms on Spivak’s lack of theoretical focus, Wright (2002) states that it is illogical to compartmentalize Spivak into a particular theoretical orientation. As Wright (2002, p.74) observes:

... Spivak is a thinker imbued with the spirit of Marxism. Her theoretical – which is to say fluid, provisional and profoundly unorthodox – Marxism, enables her to remain sensitive to the stratified spaces of class and economic structuration, the vertical within the horizontal as it were, without thereby appealing to reductive locationism. This is an important point because Wright (2002) highlights the fluidity of Spivak’s Marxist theoretical orientation which provides her with a range of ideas that qualify her as a capable and insightful commentator on both the colonial and feminist experience. As Wright (2002, p.75) asserts, Spivak’s “deconstructive readings endow her with a more nuanced understanding of the shuttle-effect between margin and centre than Eagleton’s rather ham-fisted treatment yields.” In my view, it is precisely this depth and range of understanding possessed by Spivak that enables her to make relevant and powerful observations on the fate of the subaltern in the light of increasing social and political pressures that they face as people who are situated outside the mainstream.

2.5 Homi Bhabha

Born in India and currently serving as the Director of the Humanities Centre at Harvard University, Homi Bhabha is renowned for his theoretical concepts such as mimicry, hybridity, the third space perspective and cultural difference. A recipient of the Indian government’s Padma Bhushan Award 2012 (Press Information Bureau 25 January 2012) for outstanding work in the field of literature and education, Bhabha features prominently in the third strand of postcolonial theorists whose focus is on how the colonized have resisted the power of the ruling elite.
According to Mills (2004), both Bhabha and Spivak fail to see the importance of focussing excessively on theories about the fate of the subaltern. As Mills (2004, p.94) observes, both Spivak and Bhabha's work, “generally termed postcolonial discourse theory, is largely informed by psychoanalytical theory rather than discourse theory, and is more concerned with the effects the colonial enterprise has had on current social structures and discursive formations.” Thus, both Spivak and Bhabha’s central concern goes beyond unearthing the injustices meted out by the colonial experience to an analysis on its impact on the people in colonial territories. It is these ideas that are most relevant to my work as I aim to unpack the ways in which international postgraduate students are represented in HE promotional media. In my view, it is not only important to point out how they are constructed in HE promotional media but to unravel the effects of these representations on the identities and experiences of this student cohort. In short, I see my work in alignment with the ideas of Spivak and Bhabha in providing a powerful and germane analysis of media constructions of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media.

2.5.1 Mimicry

Unlike Spivak who states that the subaltern cannot speak and that it is the role of the subaltern scholar to retrieve subaltern voices, Bhabha reveals that the marginalized can indeed speak. As Bhabha (1984, p.126) points out, the strategy of “mimicry” was imposed upon the colonized by their colonial masters as a way to create a:

… reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference … mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation: a complex strategy of reform, regulation, discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power.

Here, by examining the impact of constructing the colonized as a cheap, tawdry imitation of the colonizer, Bhabha (1984) discloses the ways in which the colonizer maintained power over the
colonized. In Bhabha’s (1984) view, by depicting the colonized as a defected version of the genuine article, in this case their colonial masters being the genuine article, the colonizer maintained their position of superiority. These are important points because an awareness of the discursive strategies employed in colonial texts to represent the subaltern signals a first step in reclaiming their voices. Additionally, Bhabha (1984) asserts that the subaltern’s voice can be reclaimed in colonial texts but the process of reclamation needs to be carried out with an awareness of the role that the subaltern voice served in colonial texts. It was a role imposed upon the subaltern with the express aim to “appropriate [s]” them as “the Other.” (Bhabha 1984 p. 126)

In her discussion on the discursive strategy of mimicry in colonial texts, Mills (2004), similar to Bhabha (1984), states that it serves the role of relegating native populations to the position of the foreign Other. As Mills (2004) observes, one of the ways in which mimicry is realized in contemporary writing can be seen when colonial cultures portray the level of development achieved by the former colonies in relation to Western standards. When colonized cultures are portrayed as lacking in comparison to a Western criterion, they are parodied and presented as backward. Mills (2004, p.99) offers an example by Bate (1992, p.15) from the mainstream media where a feature in a Sunday magazine on travel destinations used this technique:

*Kathmandu ... resembles Tudor England with its dirty narrow streets and stout poles erected between the houses to prevent them toppling in on one another ... An elephant is led through the square laden with baskets of scarlet chillies, while brown urchins dart about with laughing faces and no clothes. Yes, Nepal is too different for anyone to prevail their own morals in what they see.*

Here, Mills (2004, p.99) observes that, in his depiction of Kathmandu, Bate (1992) paints a picture of a city that is “at an arrested stage of development.” By drawing parallels to the Tudor past, Bate (1992) has relegated the residents of Kathmandu to a time in the bygone past where they are devoid of the agency and will to participate in modern day development and progress. Hence, these archaic images of people and places that are locked in time further perpetuate the idea that
they are backward and require the civilizing influence of those who are deemed more progressive and enlightened. In short, the use of mimicry in present day discourse serves to reinforce the othering of minority groups.

2.5.2 Hybridity

In his writing on identity, Bhabha (1997) observes that there has been a prevalence by the ruling elite to attribute certain fixed, immovable qualities to particular racial groups in society. As Bhabha (1997, p.37) notes, “Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.” This is significant because Bhabha (1997, p.37) points to the link between the “rigidity” of colonial discourse and the reinforcement and perpetuation of racial stereotypes through the act of constant repetition until these ideas become fixed in the minds of the general population. As a result of these discursive strategies, colonial powers were able to conveniently locate indigenous people outside mainstream society. However, through his ideas on hybrid identities and the emergence of a new subject position that he describes as the “third space”, Bhabha (1990b, p.211) challenges these rigid subject positions. This new subject position offers an alternative perspective in relation to the position of the colonized and sets the carefully constructed social framework by the colonizer into disarray. Hence, the norms created by the colonizer in relation to the subject position of the colonized can no longer be upheld. As Bhabha (1990b, p.208) observes, “A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that ‘these cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid’.” This is important because Bhabha (1990b) highlights the fact that colonizers sought to pigeon hole different racial groups according to fixed categories. However, the concept of hybrid identities fails to fit neatly into these “grid[s]” that were imposed on native populations.
According to Bhabha (1994), hybridity operates in opposition to notions of essentialism where identities are perceived to be static and unchangeable. Therefore, hybrid identities are born out of the values that are endorsed by dominant groups and also, the values upheld by the Other. It is this combination of values and practices that result in a hybrid identity. As Bhabha (1990b, p.216) observes, “hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them.” Here, Bhabha (1990b, p.211) indicates that the hybrid identity is one that is fluid and open to the creation of a new position and he refers to this new position as the “third space.” In this “third space”, Bhabha (1990b, p.211) points to the possibility for the marginalized to resist the hegemonic ideas of authoritarian groups and instead, give voice to a new way of being in the world that is an amalgamation of two opposing worlds. As scholars such as Coombes (1994) observe, Bhabha’s ideas on hybridity offer academia an avenue to explore the impact of the intermingling of different cultures and this mix is not necessarily confined to East-West interactions. In Coombes’s (1994) view, nations that possess a large number of cultures of various ethnic persuasions are likely to create hybrid cultures due to the long standing interface between these cultures.

Besides Bhabha (1990b), other scholars have also highlighted the fluid disposition of identities as a consequence of ongoing contact with different cultures and discourses. As Brah (2001, p.97) notes, the “processes of [diasporic] identity formation is always plural, and in process.” This is a key point as Brah (2001) signals that when identities are in a state of flux due to large scale human mobility across borders, there is a high possibility for change. Brah (2001) illuminates this point further by stating that the ongoing nature of identity formation and development places individuals in a position where they are constantly revising and reinventing their identities based on their daily activities and social interactions. As Brah (2001, p.183) notes, this process results in individual identities that are “constituted within the crucible of the
materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively.” Here, Brah (2001) points to a vital resource in attempting to shine a light on how minority groups in society develop and produce their hybrid identities and this resource are the rich narratives that dot the landscape of their minds. Other scholars such as Hall (2003, p.234) also concur with this view and observe that identities are in a state of what he sees as “production” and are “never complete, always in process.” Such identities can be found in Spivak’s (1988) call for the postcolonial scholar to retrieve and reclaim the silenced voices of the subaltern in a range of contemporary media.

In his writing on the value of an investigation into hybrid identities, Bhabha (2004, p.162) notes that such an investigation has the power to convey what he sees as “‘denied knowledge[s].’” This is an important point as Bhabha (2004) highlights the fact that an exploration of how native populations negotiated their identities while being controlled by the messages of the ruling elite is a vital first step in retrieving indigenous knowledge. As Spivak (1988) pointed out earlier, the aim of the colonizer was to silence the subaltern. While Spivak (1988) offered the strategy of deconstruction to unpack the voices of the subaltern, Bhabha (2004, p.162) presents the strategy of unpacking hybrid identities because he see it as a new identity that possesses the power to “enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition.” As Bhabha (1994, p.4) points out, hybrid identities are in direct opposition to a structure of hierarchical binaries, which, in his view, are nothing more than “assumed or imposed hierarchy.” Here, it is interesting to note how, Bhabha’s (1994) notions of hybridity are in direct opposition to Said’s (1978) ideas of how the West viewed the East as a fixed, immovable object. In the final analysis, Said’s (1978) contribution acts as a precursor to questioning the way the West studies the East and Bhabha’s (1994) ideas on hybridity as a tool that allows postcolonial scholars to unpack how marginalised groups create new subject positions for themselves thereby challenging the rigid racial stereotypes imposed upon them by dominant groups.
2.5.3 The third space perspective

According to Bhabha (1990b), people rely on a range of discourses to comprehend and process the multitude of communicative events in the world around them. Therefore, individuals have to make sense of different types of knowledge that are outside their own cultural perspective. In the course of this process, Bhabha (1990b, p.211) notes that “no culture is full unto itself” because the phenomenon of cultures in contact results in what Bhabha (1990b) see as a hybrid perspective. As Bhabha (1990b, p.211) observes, “hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives.” Here, Bhabha (1990b) points to the third space as a new subject position where the values and practices of the dominant majority that have become status quo are challenged and reshaped, resulting in new ways of operating in society. As Bhabha (1990b, p.211) notes, in the third space individuals have the opportunity to produce “a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.” This is significant because, as Bhabha (1990b) indicates, the third space is a position of possibility and renewal where marginalized groups have the opportunity to morph into something other than the fixed views of the dominant majority. In the third space, Bhabha (1994) states that individuals have the opportunity to negotiate their identities, making it both a space for collaboration and resistance. In this thesis, I am interested in investigating these fluid spaces of negotiation and reinvention of international postgraduate student identities. The third space perspective is most relevant to my thesis as it resonates with my argument that media representations of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media omit the ways in which international postgraduate students have negotiated new identities and ways of being in a different academic culture.

The third space is a direct challenge to the structure of hierarchical binaries that operate in society. For example in the third space, the East can be perceived as both traditional and modern at the same time as evidenced by how some Southeast Asian countries like Singapore
and Malaysia have deftly balanced rapid urban development characterized by soaring skyscrapers while preserving ancient temples and monasteries that are a reflection of their rich cultural traditions. As Bhabha (1990b, p.211) states, the third space is not a subject position that is locked in the distant past but it is a channel that “enables other positions to emerge.” Hence, the third space is a vital channel through which questions of identity and representation can be considered, resisted and even reshaped. Even though the third space is one that is mired in a range of contradictory positions, its value lies in the possibility for negotiation and reinvention rather than exclusion and isolation.

The use and the relevance of the third space perspective in studies on the academic environment have been well-documented. In the field of education, the third space perspective has been utilized by scholars to investigate a range of issues from literacy studies (Cook 2005) to science education (Emdin 2009). As Moje et al. (2004) observe, scholars have perceived the third space as a conduit through which the discourses of minority groups can be accessed. In short, it is a link that opens up a window for diverse groups to begin a conversation with each other about the issues that impact their lived experiences.

### 2.5.4 Cultural difference

Besides his ideas on mimicry, hybridity and the third space perspective, another key contribution of Bhabha’s are his ideas on cultural difference. In a world where nations propose multiculturalism and cultural diversity as the most fitting model to contend with large scale immigration, Bhabha (1990b) offers what he refers to as “cultural difference.” According to Bhabha (1990b, p.208), cultural diversity and multiculturalism fail because:

> There are two problems with it: one is that although there is always an encouragement of cultural diversity, there is also a corresponding containment of it … The second problem is that in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged, racism is still rampant in various forms. This is because the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests.
This is significant in that Bhabha (1990b) pinpoints the crucial factors that sound the death knell for lofty ideas on multiculturalism as a model to incorporate diverse cultures within homogeneous societies. In fact, Bhabha’s (1990b) writing on multiculturalism is now all the more resonant as evidenced by the dejected declarations of a number of European leaders. For example, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel observes that attempts to create a multicultural Germany has “utterly failed” (Weaver 17 October 2010). Others such as the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, asserted in a televised debate that multiculturalism has failed in France because the French “have been too concerned about the identity of the person who was arriving and not enough about the identity of the country that was receiving him” (Reporter 11 February 2011). In his commentary on multiculturalism, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron concurred with President Sarkozy when he announced that “a doctrine of ‘state multiculturalism’” has resulted in a resounding failure (Wright and Taylor 5 February 2011). In David Cameron’s view, the way forward for Britain is to view multiculturalism through a new lens where there is an understanding of different cultures while “being proud of our British citizenship” Wright and Taylor (5 February 2011).

On his rejection of cultural diversity in favour of what he terms “cultural difference”, Bhabha (1990b, p.208), explains:

My purpose in talking about cultural difference rather than cultural diversity is to acknowledge that this kind of liberal relativist perspective is in adequate in itself and doesn’t generally recognise the universalist and normative stance from which it constructs its cultural and political judgements … With the notion of cultural difference, I try to place myself in that position of liminality, in that productive space of the construction of culture as difference, in the spirit of otherness.

Here, Bhabha (1990b) observes that “cultural difference” is a “productive space” and not one that is steeped in fixed notions of its own immovable position. In short, “cultural difference” is a position where one has the potential to grow and express oneself without losing one’s identity while embracing new ways of being in the world. This is important because Bhabha (1990b)
points to an in depth interpretation of cultural differences where the experiences of people from different cultures cannot be bent and shaped to fit the mainstream culture in the name of multiculturalism. In Bhabha’s (1990b) view, cultural difference is a position that recognizes the unique quality of different cultures with the acknowledgement that nothing is lost in pursuing new ideas and positive values. These ideas are now proving to be the salvo that some European leaders are proposing as they grapple with the failure of multiculturalism. According to the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, “state multiculturalism” has failed because:

…different cultures have been encouraged to live separate lives. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values. Building a stronger sense of national and local identity holds the key to achieving true cohesion by allowing people to say ‘I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am a Christian, but I am a Londoner too. (Kuenssberg 5 February 2011)

Here, it appears that the way forward for societies where there are a multitude of cultures is to accept cultural difference and then work towards shared national goals for the future. Otherwise, the consequence will be increased levels of isolation and, as evidenced in parts of Europe, a rise in “all kinds of extremism” (Kuenssberg, 5 February 2011).

In my view, Bhabha’s ideas on cultural difference are most relevant in today’s ever changing world. As cultures are constantly in contact, the way forward is to view cultural difference as a rich resource in coming to a better understanding of the shifting fabric of society. As Bhabha (1994, p.34) points out, “cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as knowledgeable, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification.” This is significant in that it signals to me, as a researcher who is investigating issues of representation and voice in media constructions of international postgraduate students to ensure that I view the rich narratives from my research participants as a window into their own unique cultural perspectives.
2.5.5 Criticisms and response

In this section, I discuss the primary criticisms directed towards Bhabha and some of the responses of renowned scholars in the field of postcolonial studies as well as Bhabha’s own comments to these observations. I have structured my discussion by grouping the key issues that critics have faulted Bhabha for, namely his inaccessibility to readers and the lack of clarity of his methodology.

2.5.5.1 Inaccessibility to readers

According to Moore-Gilbert (1997), the criticism levelled against Bhabha, similar to Spivak, centres on his vague writing style resulting in the inaccessibility of his work to his readers. Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.115) attributes this difficulty to “the often extremely dense (or clotted) texture of his style. At times, indeed, his characteristically teasing, evasive, even quasi-mystical (or mystificatory) mode of expression seems designed to appeal primarily to the reader’s intuition.” Here, Moore-Gilbert (1997) highlights a key stumbling block for readers of Bhabha’s work where one has to struggle through layers of “dense” text in order to distil the main ideas presented by Bhabha.

In response to criticisms on the inaccessibility of Bhabha’s work, Mitchell (1995, p.80) states that Bhabha’s pioneering work has presented seemingly common place concepts such as “ambivalence” and “hybridity” in a novel manner. As Mitchell (1995, p.80) notes:

“Bhabha’s writing has been so important, I suspect, because he has made it difficult to use those words thoughtlessly or complacently. His concepts of ambivalence and hybridity have made it clear that cultures must be understood as complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities and subject positions.”

Here, Mitchell (1995, p.80) underscores the fact that Bhabha, through his work, challenges commonly held interpretations of concepts such as “ambivalence” and “hybridity” by signalling
what he saw as the unequal power relations evident as a result of historical events. As Mitchell (1995, p.80) observes:

“When it appeared that liberal notions of ‘diversity’ and post structuralist homilies about ‘difference’ might provide final vocabularies for adjudicating cultural conflict, Bhabha raised profound questions about the adequacy of pluralist models of tolerance and ‘civility’ to narrate histories of ferocious intolerance and incivility.”

Here, Mitchell (1995) highlights the inherent value and power of Bhabha’s observations of simple ideas that were used to illuminate the concept of multiculturalism. While the common belief in relation to multiculturalism is the idea that it encourages “tolerance and ‘civility’”, Bhabha forces us to unearth the underlying realities of multiculturalism which are the inadequate power relations that impact scores of people who end up being caught in various acts of injustice. Hence, as Mitchell (1995) points out, Bhabha’s writing does come across as challenging because he has expanded on commonly accepted beliefs to reveal profound truths behind seemingly innocuous ideas.

While it is interesting to examine the response of scholars such as Mitchell’s’ to the criticisms levelled against Bhabha’s inaccessible writing style, it is equally engaging to look at Bhabha’s reaction. In his interview with Bhabha, Mitchell (1995, p.80) questions Bhabha about criticisms that have been directed to him, namely that his work is “characterized as too difficult, as too political, as not political enough and just not accessible enough.” In response, Bhabha (in Mitchell 1995, p.80) states:

…generally I find that the passages pointed out to me as difficult are places where I am trying to fight a battle with myself. That moment of obscurity contains, in some enigmatic way, the limit of what I have thought, the horizon that has not been reached, yet it brings with it an emergent move in the development of a concept that must be marked, even if it can’t be elegantly or adequately realized.

This is important because Bhabha himself acknowledges the struggle to articulate complex and profound ideas that are, in his view, still in the process of being formed in a coherent format. However, rather than suppress these emergent viewpoints due to a lack of clarity, Bhabha opts to
deliver them to the reader in a manner that is reflective of his own intellectual process. While criticisms about Bhabha’s writing style may continue to flourish, his ideas remain vitally relevant to studies on representation and identity.

2.5.5.2 Unclear methodology

Besides the inaccessibility of Bhabha’s work to the reader, Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.115) also laments what he sees as “Bhabha’s methodological eclecticism.” According to Moore-Gilbert (1997), Bhabha states very clearly that he does not posit any grand theories but instead presents to the reader what he sees as “a strange cultural survival of the people” Bhabha (1990a, p.322).

In doing so, Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.115) notes that “Bhabha often bends his sources – at times radically – to his own particular needs and perspectives.” Here, Moore-Gilbert (1997) highlights a novel and perplexing strategy utilized by Bhabha where he reshapes the discourse of previous Western scholars into a mirror image that echoes the verbosity of their style. In fact, Bhabha (1990a, p.322) goes so far as to describe the writing of previous scholars such as Fanon as “occult instability.” This is significant because Bhabha (1990a) demonstrates that his response to the methodological inconsistencies of texts written by Western scholars is to respond in a similar manner. As Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.115) observes, “perhaps it has always been a common postcolonial strategy to inflect Western narratives in new ways, as is evident in the many ‘rewritings’ of metropolitan literary texts by non-Western artists. One could argue that Bhabha (and Spivak) are simply extending this subversive process of ‘re-citing’ and ‘re-sitting to the critical and theoretical arena.’” Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.115) signals that Bhabha’s “methodological eclecticism” is quite possibly intentional with the aim of indicating to the reader of his work that they would have to demonstrate the same level of commitment to his work as they would show when grappling with the work of Western scholars such as Fanon. In short, as Moore-Gilbert (1997, p.115) observes, it appears to be a “subversive process.”
2.6 Implications for research

Based on a review of literature on postcolonial theory, it is evident that its use in research where cultures are in contact is significant. In the following sections, I discuss the application of postcolonial theory in three areas of study namely, media studies, education and tourism. I have selected these fields of study because my thesis intersects across the disciplines of media and HE. Additionally, I believe that tourism research could potentially offer insights into the ways in which particular groups are represented in the promotional genres.

2.6.1 Media studies

In media studies, postcolonial theory can be applied to the promotional genres as well as the broadcast media to examine the ways in which marginalized groups are represented in a range of print and online media consisting of brochures and websites. Media representations of minorities and marginalized groups in society offer important messages about the way society views these groups. For example, some scholars such as Oloffson (2011) state that the media has the power to reinforce stereotypes in their reporting of how particular groups are represented in major catastrophic events. In her study, Oloffson (2011, p.558) utilized postcolonial theory, in particular the strategic use of “the analytical pair us and them” by the Swedish media in their portrayal of Swedish nationals caught up in the Indian Ocean tsunami and the ways in which the Thai authorities responded to the calamity. The strategy employed by the Swedish media is not new. Other scholars such as Hall (1997) have argued that representations of specific groups in society is conducted by fixating on certain qualities possessed by these groups, thus creating stereotypical depictions of them. Olofson (2011, p.559) argues that media studies could potentially assist in unearthing the stereotypical portrayals of particular groups and challenge what she views as the consequences of “the global hegemonic order.”
2.6.2 Education

Carter (2004) observes that postcolonial theory can be applied to science education both from a conceptual and methodological perspective. At the conceptual level, Carter (2004, p.825) asserts that postcolonial theory paves the way to deconstruct “new forms of imperialism embedded in globalization as well as more complex conceptualizations of culture, identity and difference appropriate to contemporary transnational global culture.” Here, Carter (2004) alludes to the Western academic practice of applying universal beliefs and practices to all cultures. At the methodological level, Carter (2004) suggests that postcolonial theory can be used in science education to question current practices. In the face of an ever changing world where cultures are in contact, postcolonial theory offers a way forward for alternative viewpoints and positions to be conveyed.

2.6.3 Tourism research

Previous work into the representation of minority groups in tourism research can be observed in travel brochures (Echtner and Prasad 2003), postcards (Albers and James 1988) and travel writing (Santos 2006). According to Crick (1985), tourism research has the potential to interrogate the representations of people from minority cultures in tourist brochures because these groups are at the mercy of the dominant culture in so far as how they are represented and presented to the wider society. Hence these dominant groups who function as the representer, have the power to select what they believe is relevant in relation to their portrayal of those groups. It is in this process of selection and representation that Crick (1985) observes unequal power balances between the representer and the represented. This echoes Said’s (1978) view that the power that the representer has over the represented can be deemed as one that is political, social and symbolic.
Other scholars such as Bakhtin (1981) concur that any interaction between the representer and the represented is one that is fraught with discourses that are bound to capture the inequalities between both parties concerned. In my view, this has implications for a range of promotional media in society today. For example, if one party is promoting some kind of service be it education, tourism or financial products, then the other party enters into the communicative setting with a desire to satisfy a need based on a position of lack. Hence, the representer in that communicative act could potentially capitalize on this lack by using discourses and images that reinforce this need or lack in the people seeking such services. The choice of discourse can be very revealing in that it provides insights into the representer’s perceptions of the represented. Thus, it is clear that when representing people from cultures that are different from the dominant culture, the criteria and selection of discourses and images to be used in the promotional genres largely depends on the knowledge that the representer has about the represented.

In HE promotional media, the representer being the university relies heavily on its view of international students based on notions of need and lack in seeking a service, in this case the service of obtaining an overseas education. Therefore, the university as an institution needs to promote HE from the perspective of prestige and images glorifying the host nation as modern and developed to counter ideas of lack if one were to remain in their home country. It is interesting to note that when one compares tourist brochures from the source countries of international students in Asia and the Middle East, their countries are portrayed as exotic, traditional and primitive. In contrast, when one juxtaposes these images with HE promotional media from Western universities, the images that one encounters are of modern, state of the art highly developed campuses. Even today, through these brochures, we can witness how the discourses and images that are utilized in the promotional genre appear to be echoing Said’s (1978) ideas on the use of binaries in Western conceptions of the East.
2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the fact that media representations of minority groups reveal important messages about the ideas that the representer has about the represented. I have made my observations based on my examination of the key concepts presented by postcolonial theory. In particular, I examine the literature on a number of postcolonial concepts including binaries, representation, othering, counter-discourse, mimicry, hybridity, the third space perspective and cultural difference. In my review, I consider the literature on postcolonial theory according to the various schools of thought within the framework. While I have highlighted the invaluable insights offered by each strand of postcolonial theory, I also acknowledge the criticisms that have been directed to each approach and present the responses to these criticisms. In my review of literature, I demonstrate how postcolonial theory links to my research methods. In particular, I clarify that my thesis is aligned with the ideas of Spivak whose prime focus is on the voices of minority groups and Bhabha, whose attention is on the ways in which minority groups have negotiated their identities in the cross-cultural encounter. Because of this emphasis, I utilize participant narratives, visual imagery and focus group data to investigate the overseas study experience of international postgraduate students and the ways in which they are represented in HE promotional media. In the upcoming chapters of my thesis, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of a university website to unpack the discourses that reveal the ways in which the university constructs its identity and that of international postgraduate students. Following this, I turn my analysis to data obtained from international postgraduate students to examine the discourses that reveal the ways in which they have negotiated their identities in making the transition into a new academic environment. Additionally, I unpack their impressions on representations of themselves and the university as evidenced in the university website. Before proceeding with this analysis, I discuss the methodological approach used in this study in the next chapter, Chapter 3.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I extend the discussion on the broad theoretical approaches outlined in Chapter 2 to provide details on my selection and use of appropriate research methods that are consistent with a postcolonial theoretical approach. I begin by discussing the merits and challenges of the case study approach and how my position as a researcher working within a postcolonial theoretical framework impacts my interrogation of the data. Specifically, I demonstrate how critical discourse analysis (CDA), narrative analysis and visual ethnography are most suited to a study on media representations of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media. I also discuss the use of a marketing studies framework presented by Jonathan Ivy (2008, p.228) known as the “new higher education marketing mix or the 7P(s) of marketing studies which offers an approach to identify the multitude of social interactions between students and the university. The 7(P)s approach is relevant to the third level of a CDA analysis (social interactions) because it captures the relationship between students and the university as it is portrayed in HE promotional media. I conclude by discussing data collection and the research procedure.

3.1 Case study approach

One of the key features of the case study approach is the fact that it may be created out of any situation as long as there are “identifiable boundaries” (Gerring 2007, p.19) that define the parameters of the study and a clear theoretical orientation for the analysis of data. If there is no theoretical framework to guide the study, then the data would not have any wider implications (Cassell and Symon 2005, p.324). Consequently, my study is guided by a postcolonial theoretical framework which seeks to answer questions on ascribed subject positions and identities though the use of various discourses and images in a selection of HE promotional media. In addition, this study draws upon participant insights on the overseas study experience of international
postgraduate students as it is understood, experienced and communicated by them. Thus, this case study is situated within a participatory action research approach.

Another defining feature of the case study is that it is an “intensive study of a single case” with the aim to “shed light on a larger class of cases.” (Gerring 2007, p.20) Hence, this study is situated in one university and the data was collected over a period of one semester. The focus of the case study approach is to collect “rich data” (Cassell and Symon 2005, p.323) and to provide “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973, p.9) in order to understand the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the data consists of a selection of online HE promotional media related to the international postgraduate demographic.

According to Cassell and Symon (2005, p.323), the case study approach has been well-documented as a legitimate form of enquiry and is considered to be a “research strategy” as opposed to a method. Therefore, a case study works in tandem with a variety of research methods which in turn, help to reduce researcher bias through a triangulation of data and theory (Cassell and Symon 2005, p.324). In keeping with the principles of case study research, this study uses a combination of CDA, narrative analysis and visual ethnography to analyse the phenomenon under investigation. While the case study approach is ideal for a close study of complex social phenomenon, this approach can be affected by researcher bias. Two types of researcher bias identified by Darke, Shanks and Broadbent (1998, p.286) are researcher bias on events and participants and “the researcher’s beliefs, values and prior assumptions.” However, researcher involvement in qualitative research is to be expected. As Walsham (2006, p.321) observes, the qualitative researcher’s involvement can be viewed “as more of a spectrum, and as changing often over time.” This is evident from the researcher’s involvement in eliciting participant responses using guided interview questions in order to understand real-world events. Therefore, it is essential for the researcher to triangulate data using multiple sources of evidence (Darke, Shanks & Broadbent 1998). In my study, data consisting of discourses and images in online HE
promotional media is triangulated by analysing the narrative and visual data created by participants that convey their overseas study experience.

3.2 Position of the researcher

In keeping with postcolonial studies, it is vital that I state the types of knowledge claims I am making at the onset. Consequently, I claim my position as a scholar from the “developing world” working and researching in a university situated in the “developed world.” Born in Malaysia but living in Australia, I too, have made the parallel journey with my research participants, across geographical and cultural boundaries to live and study in a new environment. Based on my educational and linguistic background, I am using the English Language, which is my second language, to write about the experiences and realities of other research students from the “developing world.”

By acknowledging the unique position that I am located in, I am drawing on the fact that I possess both the emic and etic perspectives in making sense of the experiences of international postgraduate students. Many scholars have described good research as combining both the emic and etic perspective (Lett 1990; Pike 1990). According to Sands (1994), the emic perspective refers to the ways in which people who belong to a particular group view the world around them and the etic perspective refers to the way researchers describe the experiences of people who belong to a particular group using theories that are relevant to their context. In my study, I am claiming a space where I am approaching my research questions from a non-Western knowledge base and where I utilize postcolonial theory to investigate social phenomenon within the HE context (etic perspective). I am also claiming the space as co-investigator with my research participants (emic perspective). As they reflect on issues of identity, culture and global self-making, I too, reflect on these issues in relation to my experiences as an international postgraduate student in an Australian university.
In addition to my position as a postcolonial scholar, it is essential to illustrate my role as a CDA researcher. The role of the CDA researcher is well-documented in the literature, where according to Taylor (2001), CDA researchers carry out studies on issues that resonate with them. These issues could be identified from the researcher’s observations of interactions in the workplace to key concerns that impact particular segments of society. As Taylor (2001, p.17) points out,

The researcher’s special interests and, possibly, personal links to the topic are not in themselves a sufficient basis for research, but they are a probable starting point for the project. They are not seen negatively as bias but as a position to be acknowledged.

In keeping with this, I claim my space as a postcolonial scholar whose interests lie in uncovering the ways in which international postgraduate students are represented in HE promotional media.

Finally, as a qualitative researcher, I maintain research rigour by ensuring that my study meets the eight qualities for high quality qualitative research outlined by Sarah Tracy (2010). These criteria include “worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence” (Tracy 2010, p.839). My topic is worthy as it is relevant to the field and offers insights into transforming knowledge within the discipline. I uphold research rigour by incorporating a variety of theoretical approaches and data sources. I am sincere by clarifying my position as the researcher at the beginning of the study. This research is credible through a triangulation of data and the presentation of “thick description” and “concrete detail” (Tracy 2010, p.840). There is potential for this research to resonate in other settings and offer conceptual and methodological contributions to the field. As mentioned earlier, the ethical considerations for this study have been met. Lastly, to achieve what Tracy (2010, p.840) terms “meaningful coherence”, I seek to achieve the goals that have been set at the beginning of this study by utilizing appropriate research methods which are supported by the literature.
3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Previous research into the use of content and semiotic analysis has highlighted the limitations of these methods. According to Albers and James (1988, p.145), the focus of content analysis is on “distribution, frequency, clustering, and corresponding conditions.” With reference to semiotic analysis, Albers and James (1988, p.150) point out that “it is incapable of explaining either how certain pictorial appearances get conventionalized or why they immerge in particular contexts.” In the light of these limitations, I outline at the beginning of my analysis of HE promotional media the focal themes around the images being analysed and refer to CDA to contextualize the meanings behind the images and discourses identified. In the following sections, I discuss the theoretical approaches to CDA, the stages of a CDA analysis, the criticisms against CDA and the responses of key scholars.

Two leading theorists in the field of CDA are Norman Fairclough and Teun Van Dijk. While there are other influential scholars in the field of CDA, I have selected these theorists because I see their ideas and methods in alignment with my study. Specifically, I see the ideas of Fairclough (1989) and Van Dijk (2000) on CDA as a relevant and viable solution to addressing the limitations of both content and semiotic analysis as indicated by Albers and James (1988). Similar to Van Dijk (2000), I am of the view that media representations of minority groups need to go beyond content analysis to a broader understanding of the socio-political and cultural contexts in which a text is situated. As Van Dijk (2000, p.35) observes in his writing on the skewed and often racist depictions of marginalized groups in the media:

Traditional approaches to the role of the media in the representation of racism were largely content analytical: quantitative studies of stereotypical words or images representing minorities … Discourse analytical approaches, systematically describe the various structures and strategies of text or talk, and relate these to the social and political context.
This is important because Van Dijk (2000) indicates that CDA goes beyond mere content analysis to examine the underlying messages in text and talk that reveal information on social structures and the way these structures serve the interests of particular groups.

Consistent with Van Dijk (2000), Fairclough (2001, p.230) points out that CDA goes beyond pure content analysis to incorporate a “critical” element which he describes as follows:

It is critical … in the sense that it seeks to discern connections between language and other elements in social life which are often opaque. These include: how language figures within social relations of power and domination; how language works ideologically; the negotiation of personal and social identities (pervasively problematized through changes in social life) in its linguistic and semiotic aspect. Second it is critical in the sense that it is committed to progressive social change.

Here, Fairclough (2001) underscores a vital feature of CDA which is the fact that any insights derived from a linguistic analysis of texts must be related to the social context in which the communicative act takes place. Additionally, the CDA analyst must also examine the effects of texts on social interactions. In this thesis, I am interested in the way a university represents its identity and that of international postgraduate students in a selection of HE promotional media. Therefore, a CDA approach to the analysis of HE promotional media requires an examination of the relationship between the university and its international postgraduate students, the ideological messages being conveyed and the ways in which both the university and its students negotiate their individual identities. In the final analysis, a CDA of texts seeks to emancipate the marginalized in society because it highlights the ways in which these groups have been silenced and seeks to facilitate “social change” (Fairclough 2001, p.230) by providing a channel for these groups to have greater participation in social interactions. In the light of this, it is vital to seek the views of such groups so as to identify their position on media representations of themselves and their communities.

3.3.1 Discourse and Ideology
Scholars such as Fairclough and Van Dijk have indicated that discourse and ideology are closely intertwined. In his writing on the link between discourse, representation and ideology, Fairclough (2003) argues that discourse has the power to impact the way that the world is represented and thus, convey particular ideologies. As Fairclough (2003, p.124) observes:

I see discourses as ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the “mental world” of thoughts, feeling, beliefs and so forth and, the social world … different discourses are different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world.

This is important because Fairclough (2003) points to the varied ways in which particular social realities are conveyed to a wider audience utilizing specific discourses. Here, Fairclough (2003, p.124) indicates that one would need to examine “the processes, relations and structures” that define particular communicative settings in order to reveal diverse and unique viewpoints on how different groups view reality. Hence, it is through these discourses that dominant groups are able to perpetuate particular sets of beliefs. As Fairclough (2003, p.9) asserts,

One of the causal effects of texts which has been of major concern for critical discourse analysis is ideological effects … ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, dominion and exploitation.

Here, Fairclough (2003) illustrates the fundamental aim in utilizing CDA which is to examine discourses in order to reveal the ideologies that are embedded within them. As Fairclough (2003) notes, ideologies shape the way the world is viewed. If an unquestioning audience accepts the ideological positions conveyed in text and talk, then powerful groups in society have successfully managed to redefine social interactions by claiming an authoritative role. The danger of this, Fairclough (2003) points out, is the potential for dominant groups to not only maintain their supremacy over others but even worse, to exploit the unquestioning masses.

To illustrate the way ideology is conveyed through discourse, Fairclough (2003, p.45) offers his observations on the construction of the catch phrase “global economic change” in a text that was produced by the European Union (EU):
It is similar to many other contemporary texts in representing global economic change as a process without human agents ... a process in a general and ill-defined present and without history (it is just what ‘is’) which is universal (or, precisely, ‘global’) in terms of place, and an inevitable process which must be responded to in particular ways – an ‘is’ which imposes an ‘ought’ or rather a ‘must.

This is significant because Fairclough (2003, p.45) points to the discursive strategy used by powerful organizations such as the EU to present world events as an ‘inevitable process’ meaning that world events are given life-like qualities as if these events could leap forward of their own accord without any human intervention. Here, in its construction of “global economic change”, the EU maintains its power on the way the world perceives economic upheavals by asserting that such events are beyond anyone’s control. Therefore, the EU’s desired global response to such economic calamities is one that is decisive as evidenced in the use of the modal “must” (Fairclough 2003, p.45). It is these types of subtle messages within particular discourses that permeate daily life and are of concern to critical discourse analysts such as Fairclough.

In his writing on the way ideology is maintained and distributed in texts, Van Dijk (1998, p.31), asserts that a CDA approach involves examining “[headlines], story structures, arguments, graphical arrangements, syntactic structures, semantic structure of coherence, overall topics and so on.” Here, Van Dijk (1998) underscores a vital feature of CDA which is to go beyond a lexicogrammatical analysis to unpack a range of social issues that define a particular communicative setting. For example, in his analysis of depictions of racism in the American media, Van Dijk (2000) observes that an ideology of racial stereotypes is perpetuated when minority groups are portrayed in the media as perpetrators of crimes while the majority white population are seen as either the victims of these atrocities or active agents who stand up to these negative behaviours in defence of their families and communities. These constant images of privileging one group while vilifying another group has led to what Van Dijk (2000 p.48) sees as “negative mental models, stereotypes, prejudices and ideologies about others.” As a result of these attitudes and
behaviours, Van Dijk (2000, p.48) asserts that “the enactment and reproduction of racism” continues to plague society.

According to Van Dijk (1998), the link between discourse and ideology can be detected when one unpacks the role that discourse plays in championing the beliefs of dominant groups in society. Consistent with Fairclough, Van Dijk (1998, p.24) observes that “many ideologies develop precisely in order to sustain, legitimate or manage group conflicts, as well as relationships of power and dominance.” In addition to that, Van Dijk (1998) also observes that ideologies have the potential to resolve problems within groups thereby allowing groups to advance their shared or collective vision. This is an important point because ideologies are not merely linked to the wealthy and powerful but also have the potential for weaker groups to mobilize and contest dominant ideologies. This is well documented in the literature. Several studies demonstrate that groups such as the Occupy Movement who push for greater accountability in the relationship between governments and financial institutions have successfully reshaped dominant discourses to convey their ideology and mobilize their supporters into action through the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; DeLuca, Lawson et al. 2012; Juris 2012). Thus, through the reshaping of discourses, they were able to impact the national and international conversation on the issues that meant the most to them. Consequently in my study, I investigate how international postgraduate students construct their identities as research scholars and navigate the discourses of internationalization as it is depicted in a selection of HE promotional media in one Australian university. I also examine their responses to HE promotional media through their narrative accounts of the overseas study experience. These insights have the potential to reshape dominant discourses embedded within HE promotional media.

3.3.2 Discourse as a social practice
Following Fairclough (2003) I take the approach of viewing discourse as part of a social practice which results in key players within a communicative setting occupying different subject positions. As Fairclough (2003, p.124) argues, “Discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather seems to be), they are projective imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions.” Here, Fairclough (2003) signals the link between discourse and social interactions and the power of discourses to redefine the way the world is perceived. In my thesis, I am interested in examining the complex social interactions that exist between the university as an institution and international postgraduate students as it is communicated and represented in HE promotional media. I concur with Fairclough’s (2003, p.124) assessment that the approach of unpacking discourse as a social practice could potentially reveal the ways in which the world is shaped (and reshaped) in order to communicate the “projective imaginaries” or the envisioned agendas of particular groups in society. Therefore, through a CDA approach to data analysis, I unpack a corpus consisting of textual and visual images from a university website to examine how the identities of both the institution and international postgraduate students is represented through the discourses of internationalization. I believe that insights obtained from a CDA of this corpus could possibly disclose important information on the various subject positions occupied by a university and its international postgraduate students within its HE promotional media.

According to Van Dijk (2000, p.48), it is essential to examine the “various levels of discourse” in order to obtain insights into the ways that discourse operates in society. To do this, I turn to Fairclough (1989, p.26) who suggests exploring the “three dimensions of discourse” which is “the relationship between texts, interactions, and social contexts” in order to gain insights on the way discourse operates in society. As Fairclough (1989, p.26) observes:

… in seeing language as discourse and social practice, one is committing oneself not just to analysing texts, nor just to analysing processes of production and interpretation, but to analysing the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions, both the
immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of the institutional and social structures.

This is significant because Fairclough (1989) underscores a vital feature of CDA which is the connection between a number of elements that influence text production namely, the formal structure of a text, the ways in which a text is created and received by its audience and the social context in which the communicative act occurs.

Based on the rationale above, Fairclough (1989, p.26) offers strategies for the analysis of each dimension of discourse. At the level of texts, he offers the strategy of “description” which involves examining texts for their “formal properties.” In my thesis, this would involve an investigation into the genre of the promotional media and how HE promotional media messages are structured and organized within a university website including written and visual content. At the level of interactions, Fairclough (1989, p.26) proposes the strategy of “interpretation” which involves “seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation.” This is significant because Fairclough (1989) highlights that not only should researchers analyse how texts are created but also consider the ways in which the audience responds to the text. In my thesis, this would involve unpacking the writing and design processes undertaken by the university to create HE promotional media content and the ways in which international postgraduate students view these messages. Finally, at the level of social contexts, Fairclough (1989, p.26) suggests using the strategy of “explanation” which involves examining “the relationship between interaction and social context – with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects.” Fairclough (1989) urges researchers to examine the social context that affects the ways in which the text is produced and received in a particular communicative setting. In my thesis, this involves an investigation into the effects of HE promotional media namely the way it has shaped and reshaped the identities of both the university as an institution and international postgraduate students as consumers of education. In the final analysis, it is clear that Fairclough (1989) offers
researchers a powerful and relevant approach to analyse the way discourses function in a range of communicative settings. In the next section, I outline the steps for a CDA analysis and discuss how I apply this framework to my analysis of HE promotional media.

3.3.3 CDA framework for analysis

It is my central concern to investigate how a university uses a variety of discourses in addition to the discourses of internationalization to tap into the “global imagination” of international postgraduate students (Appadurai 1996, p.3). In particular, I examine the discourses that construct the overseas study experience as attractive while simultaneously depicting the university as an institution of power and prestige so as to achieve a leading edge over its competitors. According to Fairclough (2003, p.124), discourses like these have the potential “to change the world in particular directions.” My rationale for the analysis is supported by Fairclough’s (1993, p.143) observation that “the discursive practices (orders of discourse) of higher education are in the process of being transformed through the increasing salience within HE of promotion as a communicative function.” This is significant because Fairclough (1993) indicates that academia and the idea of promotion are closely connected. Hence, the discursive practices related to academia and the promotional genre is now more pronounced in HE promotional media. It is precisely these changes in HE promotional media that is explored in greater detail in the analysis in Chapter 4.

As indicated above, a CDA of the language used by an institution requires an explicit framework for analysis. Since the discursive practices of institutions are not always apparent (Bourdieu 1977, p.2), a close study of these practices necessitates an identification of the “orders of discourse” (Fairclough 1993, p.143). Therefore, I refer to Fairclough’s (2001, p.236) framework for critical discourse analysis to unpack the discourses of internationalization in a selection of online HE promotional media according to the stages outlined below. As Fairclough (2001)
indicates, the analysis of the discourse occurs in stages 2c and 4. However, it is vital that the researcher structures the analysis according to this framework in order to meet the objectives of CDA which is to not only identify the links between language and social interactions but to also facilitate the emergence of new practices that are more socially inclusive.

Stage 1: Identify a social problem with a semiotic feature

According to Fairclough (2001), the researcher begins a CDA by outlining the issues that define a particular topic. Once the issues have been identified, then the analysis can take place. As Fairclough (2001, p.229) observes,

The starting point for CDA is social issues and problems. It analyses texts and interactions and indeed any type of semiotic material (written texts, conversations, television programmes, advertisements on billboards, etc) but does not begin with texts and interactions, it begins with issues which preoccupy sociologists, or political scientists or educationalists.

Consistent with this approach, in Chapter 1, I stated that media representations of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media do not accurately capture their identities as research scholars. Instead, they are depicted in a manner that fulfils the rhetorical strategies of the promotional genre. As a result of this approach, the realities of the overseas study experience and the identities of international postgraduate students as autonomous researchers are not conveyed effectively. Additionally, the only impressions that society has of this cohort is consigned to the skewed depictions obtained from the mainstream media where international students are often portrayed as nothing more than “cash cows” (Craig 2010, 23 May) or “soft targets” (Turtle 2009, 22 May). In my view, these issues impact social interactions and qualify as social problems as defined by Fairclough (2001, p.236) who argues that “[problems] may be in the activities of social practice – in the social practice per se, or in the representation of social practice.” In my thesis, I argue that the “representation of social practice” which is the media representations of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media could potentially
lead to problems “in the activities of a social practice” which is their overseas study experience. For example, inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the media representations of international postgraduate students could possibly lead to false expectations of the overseas study experience. Also, a failure to capture the identities of international postgraduate students as autonomous researchers at an overseas university relegates them to a position of lack as opposed to one as active contributors of knowledge at their overseas university of choice.

Therefore, in this study, I investigate the portrayal of international postgraduate students in HE promotion media by examining the impact of the discourses of internationalization on the identities of both the university and international postgraduate students. Through the unpacking of the “orders of discourse” (Fairclough, 1993, p.143) in this study, I identify the problems that may have arisen from a mismatch in student expectations in relation to the overseas study experience as it is depicted and conveyed through HE promotion media. According to Fairclough (2001, p.237), some of the questions that may be asked at this stage include how certain groups are portrayed, who controls the messages that are being conveyed and whose voice is privileged.

Stage 2: Present obstacles to the social problem being addressed by analysing:

a) “[The] network of practices it is located within”

According to Fairclough (2001, p.237), the “network of practices” in which a communicative act occurs refers to its social context. Fairclough (2001) asserts that researchers need to ascertain the “network” or the different levels of social interactions that impact upon the object that is under analysis. In my study, the object under analysis is a selection of HE promotional media and the “network of practices” refers to the university website, which has the power to shape the various types of communication within the university. In this study, I focus on the communication between the university and international postgraduate students as actualized through the university website. The effect of this channel of communication translates into real life as the overseas
study experience. Therefore, I obtain insights into the overseas study experience by investigating the interactions students have with the university administration, academic staff, other students, their impressions of the actual physical space that they occupy and a range of processes that influence their lives as university students. As the levels of communication are varied and expansive, I refer to marketing studies for a viable framework that captures these complex social interactions. One such framework is the “new higher education marketing mix” offered by Ivy (2008, p.288). According to Ivy (2008, p.289),

The marketing mix is a set of controllable marketing tools that an institution uses to produce the response it wants from its various target markets. It consists of everything that the university can do to influence the demand for services that it offers. Tangible products have traditionally used a 4Ps model, the services sector on the other hand uses a 7P approach in order to satisfy the needs of the service provider’s customers: product, price, place, promotion, people, physical facilities and processes.

Here, Ivy (2008) explicitly describes the various contexts that impact “the network of practices” (Fairclough 2001, p. 237) within the HE context. In his analysis, Ivy (2008, p.288) outlines what he refers to as the “7Ps” namely product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and processes. This is elaborated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>What is being sold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>What is being charged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Teaching and learning delivery modes – face to face, online or distance education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Advertising, publicity and promotional media efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Academic, administrative and support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical evidence</td>
<td>Teaching materials, buildings and facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>Enquiries, registrations, course evaluations, results dissemination, examinations and graduations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Adapted from Ivy (2008)

The 7P(s) presented in the “new higher education marketing mix” by Ivy (2008, p.288) has implications for a CDA of HE promotional media because it provides a context for the analysis of social context in which interactions between international postgraduate students and the university take place. In short, a CDA analysis of the ways in which the 7P(s) are constructed in
HE promotional media provides insights on how international postgraduate students and the overseas study experience is presented and constructed by the university. At this stage of the analysis, Fairclough (2001, p.237) suggests that the researcher examine whether there are problems in the way key messages are conveyed and constructed. In my study, this would involve an examination of whether the depiction of the 7Ps in HE promotional media is consistent with the overseas study experience of international postgraduate students.

b) “[The] relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned”

After identifying the contexts that shape the types of communication that take place within the “network of practices”, Fairclough (2001, p.237) suggests examining “the ways in which semiosis figures within the network of practices concerned.” In my study, this level of analysis involves an investigation into the ways in which semiosis conveys the messages of the 7Ps in ways that are attractive and engaging to prospective international postgraduate students. This stage of the analysis also involves an investigation into the ways in which the university uses innovative textual and visual strategies to ensure that it has a leading edge over its competitors. Therefore, an identification of the types of discourses and images used to set it apart from other universities could also be pursued at this level of analysis.

c) “[The] discourse (the semiosis itself) by means of structural analysis, interactional analysis, interdiscursive analysis, linguistic and semiotic analysis”

At this level of analysis, Fairclough (2001, p.237) proposes the use of various types of linguistic and semiotic analysis in order to obtain a holistic picture of the problems and obstacles to communication within a social context. Thus, the analysis of texts at this level needs to be related to the ways in which the discourses and images that surface are realized in social interactions. As Fairclough (2001, p.238) observes, “[it] … depends on how representations produced in particular
parts of the media are taken up in other social practices (education, work, government, everyday life, etc).” In short, this level of analysis involves going beyond an analysis of text structure to its impact on the realities of interpersonal communication in a variety of settings.

In his writing on the types of analysis that can be used at this level, Fairclough (2001) suggests using interactional analysis, interdiscursive analysis and linguistic analysis. Each type of analysis entails unpacking different types of social interactions within a communicative setting. As Fairclough (2001, p.239) observes, interactional analysis refers to “the analysis of actual conversations, interviews, written texts, television programmes and other forms of semiotic activity.” Here, Fairclough (2001) underscores the interactional nature of texts whereby an audience’s response is a vital part of communication. In order to unpack the interactional nature of texts, Fairclough (2001, p.240) suggests conducting an interactional analysis through a “[linguistic]/semiotic analysis of text, an interdiscursive analysis of interaction” and a ‘social analysis of interaction.” Hence, this stage of the analysis involves an analysis of text production, reception and the effects of its distribution on its target audience. As Fairclough (2001, p.240) observes,

The aim of the analysis is to show how semiotic, including linguistic properties of the text connect with what is going on socially in the interaction. What CDA claims is that this connection is interdiscursively mediated: that what is going on socially is, in part what is going interdiscursively in the text, i.e. how it brings together particular genres and discourses … and that the interdiscursive work of the text materializes in its linguistic and other semiotic features.

Here, Fairclough (2001, p.241) points to the interconnections between various “genres and discourses” that are brought together in text production. More importantly, Fairclough (2001) asserts that these features are visible beyond the text as evidenced in the way social interactions are conducted. For example, HE promotional media is increasingly taking on the features of the promotional media genre and this is evident in social interactions where prospective students are
seen as consumers and universities are portrayed as similar to holiday destinations in tourist brochures (Fairclough 1993; Askehave 2007).

Stage 3: “[Consider] whether the social order (network of practices) 'needs' the problem”

According to Fairclough (2001, p.238), this stage of the analysis requires an examination of the way social interactions and representations of various groups are portrayed in texts in order to identify if “[such] forms of interactions or representations could be seen as serving some wider social interest or purpose, for example sustaining relations of authority between elites or experts and the rest of society, or producing social divisions which might facilitate strategies of domination.” Here, Fairclough (2001) highlights the fact that this stage of the analysis requires an examination of particular ideologies and agendas that are at work in texts in order to maintain social order and power structures. In my study, this involves an investigation into the ways in which the university’s depiction of the 7Ps in a selection of HE promotional media perpetuates particular ideologies. It also includes an exploration into the ways in which international postgraduate students view these representations of the university and the overseas study experience as it is presented to them. Hence, this stage of the analysis would provide an account of how the current “social order” (Fairclough 2001, p.238) privileges certain voices while silencing others.

Stage 4: Identify possible ways past the obstacles

At this stage of the analysis, Fairclough (2001) urges researchers to examine the inconsistencies at the different levels of communication. As Fairclough (2001, p.239) asserts, “Rather than focusing upon how the network of practices holds together, it focuses on the gaps and contradictions that exist … what are the incompletions, gaps, paradoxes and contradictions in the text?” This important because Fairclough (2001) encourages the researcher to think beyond the text to the way messages in the text are received and realized in its social context. In my study,
these insights could potentially assist in overcoming a mismatch between student expectations and student experience.

**Stage 5: Reflect critically on the analysis**

According to Fairclough (2001, p.239), this stage of the analysis involves asking, “How can critical analysis of texts and interactions contribute to emancipatory change? This requires critical reflection on how we are working, on how we write, on the meta-language we use for analysing semiosis.” Here, Fairclough (2001) states that this stage requires the analyst to reflect on his or her role in identifying and specifying a problem and how a critical analysis of texts can contribute to social change. In this study, through an unpacking of the discourses of internationalization in HE promotional media and an examination of the students’ overseas study experience, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the way a university portrays and communicates its institutional identity and that of international postgraduate students. These insights could potentially offer pathways to a more socially inclusive relationship which in turn may lead to more authentic media representations of both parties concerned.

**3.3.4 Criticisms and responses**

Although CDA has been utilized to study complex social interactions in a variety of fields, renowned scholars such as Widdowson have outlined two perceived flaws in CDA. Firstly, Widdowson (1995, p.158) points out that the “scope and commitment of enquiry” in CDA appears unclear. To clarify, Widdowson (1995) states that CDA utilizes both linguistic theory and social theory to investigate social phenomenon. In doing so, Widdowson (1995) observes that a CDA analysis is weak because it privileges one perspective over another. As Widdowson (1995, p.159) notes, “In one case, you will look at social data as evidence of language processes and in the other case, you will look at linguistic data as evidence of social processes.” Hence, in Widdowson’s (1995) view, the scope of the investigation appears to be vague.
In response, Fairclough (1996, p.52) asserts that CDA originated from left wing politics and has a strong orientation towards “theories of power and ideology and to the analysis of, for instance media, institutional interactions, language and gender or ethnicity.” Therefore, CDA goes beyond Widdowson’s claim that it privileges either linguistic or social theory. Instead, CDA is informed by political movements or ideologies when approaching the analysis of complex social phenomenon. Far from being weak, these perspectives provide a rich and detailed background to better understand social interactions in a variety of settings. As Fairclough (1996, p.52) points out, “we are all – including Widdowson – writing from within particular discursive practices, entailing particular interests, commitments, inclusions, exclusions and so forth.” In my study, the insights derived from a CDA of HE promotional media and a narrative analysis are examined against the backdrop of postcolonial theory to provide a powerful analysis of the social interactions between international postgraduate students and the university.

Besides issues related to the scope of inquiry, Widdowson (1995) highlights the point that CDA is not really a form of analysis because it merely provides an interpretation of discourse. As Widdowson (1995, p.169) states,

To the extent that critical discourse analysis is committed, it cannot provide analysis but only partial interpretation. What analysis would involve would be the demonstration of different interpretations and what language data might be adduced as evidence in each case. It would seek to explain just how different discourses can be can be derived from the same text, and indeed how the very definition of discourse as the pragmatic achievement of social action necessarily leads to the recognition of such plurality.

In his analysis, Widdowson (1995) suggests that CDA should offer several interpretations of discourse and also present the various discourses that are embedded in texts that are under investigation.

In response to the above criticisms, Fairclough (1996) states that Widdowson has misunderstood the meaning of interpretation. According to Fairclough (1996), in CDA, the analyst interprets texts in two distinct ways. Firstly the CDA analyst unpacks the text for its literal meaning.
Secondly, the analyst seeks “to show connections between both properties of the texts and practices of interpretation in a particular social space, and wider social cultural properties of that particular social space” (Fairclough 1996, p.50). Hence, it is clear from Fairclough’s response that CDA goes beyond interpretation to analysis when the analyst relates the features of a text to the way social interactions are enacted in a variety of settings. In my study, I relate the textual and visual features of HE promotional media to the complex social interactions between international postgraduate students and the university.

3.4 Narrative Inquiry

According to Fairclough’s (1989, p.26), “three dimensions of discourse”, the second dimension involves an analysis into the ways in which texts are received by the audience. In my study, an analysis of the ways in which HE promotional media is received by international postgraduate students begins with an investigation into their impressions of the discourses and images encountered upon first contact with these media. These messages could be delivered through a range of media such as the university website or print media such as the university prospectus. As these messages are presented to international postgraduate students, they interact with key content and claim their identities as consumers of HE. In order to obtain a clearer picture of the meaning-making processes employed by these students in relation to messages received in HE promotional media, I utilize narrative inquiry. As students move from being consumers of HE to experiencing the realities of the overseas study experience, they will have opportunities to reflect and revise their original expectations and perceptions. To source these changing ideas, I analyse participant narratives detailing their journey to Australia and their experiences as consumers of HE. These narrative accounts allow students to represent their overseas study experience according to their unique perspectives. This approach is consistent with Racine and Petrucka’s
(2011, p.15) call to “decolonize research” by viewing research participants as a source of knowledge on complex social phenomenon.

Narrative inquiry is particularly suitable for data collection into human experiences because humans make sense of the world around them through the stories they tell themselves and each other (Clandinin 2006; Hendry 2009; Lai 2010). Hence, narrative researchers are involved in the act of collecting and analysing the stories of people’s lives. In order to tap into human stories, narrative researchers could refer to data from a range of sources. According to Savin-Baden and Van NieKerk (2007, p.463), data containing the stories of people’s experiences may consist of “field notes of shared experiences, journal records of participants, unstructured interviews, storytelling, letter writing and autobiographical and biographical writing.” Once the researcher has identified potential sources for data collection, the researcher must not only be skilled at drawing out stories from research participants but also be able to analyse these stories using an appropriate framework for analysis. As Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007, p.464) observe, narrative research embodies the constructivist approach to data analysis within the field of qualitative research and requires the researcher to view the interviewee as a "storyteller" as opposed to a research participant. Therefore, the narrative researcher must be patient and willing to experience changes in the way the stories are conveyed and presented.

One of the key benefits of narrative research is that it offers “multiple ways of knowing” (Hendry 2009, p.72). This is of particular importance because one of the broad aims of my study is to obtain international postgraduate student perspectives on a selection of HE promotional media. A simple textual analysis of the materials under investigation will be devoid of these invaluable perspectives. As Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007, p.461) observe, narrative research is useful in evaluating generally accepted truths within particular communities and groups because "humans are storytelling organisms who lead storied lives." This is of particular
relevance to my study because I aim to unpack the experiences of a particular group of international postgraduate students in one Australian university.

Narrative research is also beneficial in that it validates the life experiences of participants and is enjoyable for them as they view themselves as "co-inquirers and co-collaborators" in the research (Savin-Baden & Van-Niekerk 2007, p.471). This is consistent with the postcolonial theoretical framework that underpins this study, where the emphasis is on a participatory approach to data collection. As Racine and Petrucka (2011, p.17) stress, in bringing to surface the varied perspectives of non-western research participants, researchers are actively demonstrating their "recognition of non-western subjectivities as sources of knowledge."

While narrative research is beneficial for studies on human experience, it is important to note that the narrative researcher has a responsibility towards research participants in ensuring that in the telling of their life stories, ethical considerations are observed. Clandinin (2006, p.52) states that an adherence to the ethical considerations of narrative inquiry begins with an acknowledgement that it is a process of "negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices." Hence, the driving force behind ethical considerations in narrative research should be the knowledge that the research that is being conducted may in fact be a positive agent of change in the lives of those who are being investigated. To do this, Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007, p.462) urge narrative researchers to assist research participants in conveying their life stories by setting up a 'meaning frame" as opposed to following their own agendas and concerns. Therefore, narrative researchers should use prompts consisting of open-ended questions and avoid questions that require participants to intellectualize situations. They also suggest using follow up statements with reference to the sequence and order of information conveyed by participants. For example, “You said working in a different environment was very complicated, can you tell me some more about that?” (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk 2007, p.462). With carefully presented "meaning frame(s)” (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk 2007, p.462), the narrative researcher could
potentially reduce researcher bias in the elicitation and collection of data from the research participants. With this rationale in mind, in this study I use open ended questions in focus group sessions to obtain participants responses to a selection of HE promotional media.

3.5 Investigating identities

As indicated above, a fundamental aspect of this study consists of uncloaking the ways in which a university constructs and communicates its institutional identity and that of its international postgraduate students in HE promotional media. Additionally, I seek to uncover the ways in which international postgraduate students claim their identities as research scholars at an overseas university. To do so, I turn to the literature to investigate how identities are performed, claimed and communicated. I also explore possible research methods to study and analyse identities. My discussion is framed according to the study of institutional identities, narrative identities and visual identities.

3.5.1 Institutional identities

Narrative theory is in harmony with CDA, particularly as they both address the issue of institutional identities. According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.87), the CDA approach to analysing institutional identities involves “a critique of institutions as structures that embed power relations within them.” This is vital because an essential feature of CDA is to analyse how institutions maintain and communicate their power utilizing a range of discourses. Therefore, a first step towards an examination of institutional identities involves an interrogation into how it constructs its identity from the perspective of “its organization, people’s orientation to institutional goals [and] lexical choices” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.88).

The study of institutions as entities of power is one that is well demonstrated in the literature. Scholars such as Althusser (1971) and Habermas (1987) have theorized institutional power relationships as being exerted through a range of bureaucratic systems which suppress
the role of the individual. Other scholars such as Foucault (1972), as mentioned in Chapter 2, view institutional power as tacitly maintained by a multitude of actors comprising of government officials to other agents in society such the media and writers. In recent times, scholars such as Grant and Iedema (2005) have theorized institutional power relationships as fluid whereby the degree of power exerted by the institution is achieved through active interactions with their audience. It is this approach that is adopted in my study, where, as a CDA analyst, I seek to “chart the ways people are enlisted by, demonstrate complicity with, negotiate or resist institutional agendas.” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.89).

In my study, I am interested in the way the university as an institution constructs its identity in HE promotional media because these constructed identities are the ways in which the university begins a conversation with prospective international postgraduate students. Therefore, an examination of these institutional identities could potentially reveal the myriad of ways in which the university exerts its power over this cohort. To unpack the university’s institutional identity, I analyse university web pages that are relevant to the international postgraduate student population namely the university homepage, the international student page, the postgraduate student page and the research page. In my study, I refer to Benwell and Stokoe’s (2006, p.116) approach to the analysis of institutional identities by unpacking institutional discourses according to the dimensions of “representation in language”, “position within discourse” and “the expressive function of language.” This analysis is conducted at Stage 2c of Fairclough’s (2001) framework for CDA analysis as the aim is to unearth the various linguistic and semiotic features within the text that capture and convey the institution’s identity. These dimensions and the types of analysis involved are presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Types of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>• Transitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Metaphor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The use of the above framework is demonstrated in Benwell and Stokoe’s (2006) CDA of how a UK university constructs its identity through its home page. In the dimension of representation, Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.118) observe that the university utilizes “quantification discourse” which is similar to vocabulary that is used in the promotional genres. This is visible in the use of statistical information such as “97%”, “within six months” and “6,000 employees.” Here, the university is presented as a corporation similar to those in the business world. Through the use of the discourse of quantification, the university offers concrete evidence to its audience in relation to its success and exceptional service. In addition to that, the “discourse of education as a product” also abounds (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.119). For example, through the use of the phrase “skills and experience that give them a real competitive edge”, the university articulates itself as a business offering a product that will translate into benefits for its prospective clients. Hence, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.119) point out, “knowledge is a product rather than a process” in university promotional texts.

In addition to the dimension of representation, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) highlight the use of pronouns in the university home page. Here, in the dimension of position it is interesting to see that “the university is personalized via the first-person plural ‘we’ with no reference to the audience as ‘you’.” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.118). The overall effect of this strategy is to create a strong corporate identity minus any reference to the audience because it is this identity that serves as a selling point to prospective students. Thus, it is vital for the university to draw attention to its distinct institutional identity by emphasizing its voice over that of its audience.
Besides a formidable corporate identity, it is also essential for universities to earn the trust and respect of their audience. According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006), universities obtain credibility by making references to external agents, in particular governing bodies that ensure standards such as the UK Quality Assurance Agency and Research Assessment Exercise. In the same vein, the university also demonstrates its strong relationships with key players such as industry partners through phrases such as “Our strong links with employers make us ideally placed …” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.119). This is important because the university is able to signal to prospective students that their end goal of securing suitable employment upon completion of their studies could potentially be met due to the powerful ties that the university has with potential employers.

In their analysis, Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.118) also note that the university is constructed as “attractive.” This is evident in the dimension of expression where “positive lexis with high modal value” was used as seen in phrases such as “one of the … leading”, “highest commendation”, “strong research” and “one of the most popular.” The use of collocations such as “drive forward” and employability agenda” were also evident. Here, the effect is similar to expressions used in advertising material where the service provider in this case the university is portrayed as taking an active role by meeting the needs of the customer, in this case prospective students.

The impact of the advertising genres on the professional and academic genres has been viewed by scholars such as Bhatia (2005) as similar to an invasion. As Bhatia (2005, p.220) observes, “[o]f all the genres which have invaded the territorial integrity of most professional and academic genres, ‘advertising’ clearly stands out to be the most prominent instrument of colonization.” Here, Bhatia (2005) highlights the fact that in the competitive workplace, the increase of information technology and the proliferation of new media have resulted in the absorption of different genres into the academic and professional environment. Thus, it is no
wonder that HE promotional media has been influenced by the promotional genre resulting in new ways of perceiving the university’s institutional identity. This invasion of discourses and genres echoes Said’s (1978) views (see Chapter 2) on how knowledge is constructed maintained and disseminated by dominant groups in society. In HE promotional media, the power of the advertising world has subtly infiltrated the academic world consistent with expressive statements that portray the university as a powerful corporation. It is these instances of “colonization” that interest me in my analysis of the university’s institutional identity in its HE promotional media. To analyse these features, I refer to Bhatia’s (2005) framework for the study of the rhetorical moves commonly used in advertising. In my analysis, I seek to determine which moves are evident in HE promotional media as well as identify the discourses within each move that capture the university’s institutional identity. This analysis is positioned at Stage 2c of Fairclough’s (2001) framework for CDA analysis as the aim is to unearth the various rhetorical moves within the text that represent the institution’s identity. The framework is presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Description of rhetorical move</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Headlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Targeting the market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Justifying the product or service by establishing a niche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Detailing the product or service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Establishing credentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Endorsement or testimonials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Offering incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Using pressure tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Soliciting response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Signature line and logo etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Adapted from Bhatia (2005, p.214)

According to Bhatia (2005), the above moves do not necessarily have to occur in any particular order nor do all the moves have to be utilized in an advertisement. The choice and selection of moves is entirely at the discretion of advertising copywriters whose primary focus is in meeting the expectations of their target audience.
3.5.2 Narrative identities

Narrative data is widely used by researchers to investigate the way people construct their identities in a range of social situations. According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.130), the key issues that need to be considered when analysing narrative identities are, “[how] we might define narrative, on what sorts of occasions narratives get told, how analysts find identity in instances of storytelling and what people are doing when they tell stories.” Here, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) point out that storytelling is an important social skill that people use to make sense of their life experiences. Based on this premise, Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.130) argue that “it is in narrative that we construct identities.” This is the approach that I use in my study on the construction of international postgraduate student identities in HE promotional media. Specifically, I explore how international postgraduate students themselves perceive their identities as a result of the overseas study experience. To do this, I analyse narrative and visual data because, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006) point out, narrative data is biographical in nature and offers researchers an instance of a person’s life history. Therefore, the traditional semi structured interview does not serve as an appropriate research method to obtain narrative data. I then contrast my findings to the way these identities are communicated by the university in a selection of HE promotional media. The results provide insights on institutional perceptions of international postgraduate student identities and the actual perceptions of this cohort.

Prior to my analysis, I establish the parameters for analysis by determining the features of narratives. According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.133), narratives have a number of characteristics such as “a teller and a trajectory: they are expected to ‘go’ somewhere with a point and resolution. They have beginnings, middles and ends, and include the recounting of events that are displaced spatially and, crucially, temporally.” In my study, the “teller(s)” are the international postgraduate students who participated in the research. The “trajectory” is the path taken by this cohort from their first contact with HE promotional media up to their experiences.
upon arrival. The narrative data from these students also contain “beginnings, middles and ends” detailing their experiences that are situated within a particular period of time.

My analysis of the narrative data in this study is informed by positioning theory based on the work of Davies and Harre (1990). According to Davies and Harre (1990, p.45), discourse can be viewed as “an institutionalised use of language and language-like sign systems.” Here, Davies and Harre (1990) underscore the fact that particular discourses emerge within specific contexts to convey ideas about that communicative setting. Thus, in the area of HE, I explore the discourses of internationalization within HE promotional media and examine how international postgraduate students perceive their identities in this context. According to Davies and Harre (1990), discourses offer people a multitude of resources to draw upon in order to create their immediate realities. For instance, people can draw from various disciplines, politics, culture and a range of other sources to make sense of their worlds. Hence, people create their realities through a complex interplay between their daily use of language otherwise known as their “discursive practices” (Davies and Harre 1990, p.46) to form ideas about their world and their identities. A vital characteristic of these discursive practices is the idea of “subject positions” (Davies and Harre 1990, p.46) which enables people to elicit different types of identities that are available to them within a particular communicative context. As Davies and Harre (1990, p. 46) point out, “An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate.” Thus, in my study, I explore the various discursive practices that international postgraduate students engage in as they interact with HE promotional media and the identities they claim as a result of this process.

Currently, there is no prescribed method for the analysis of narrative data. Instead, there are a number of approaches used by scholars in a variety of disciplines from education, psychology to medical studies. One method is the performance approach which Skultans (2000,
p.9) sees as “more far reaching” because this approach accepts “that all of human experience has an essentially narrative structure.” Skultans (2009, p.7) argues that narratives are action orientated and intentional because “[the] narrator lays out for us the events, circumstances and [her] responses which lead [her] to make certain knowledge claims and value judgements.” Hence, in my study, I view the narrative data obtained from international postgraduate students on the overseas experience as an account of their experiences, responses to those experiences and glimpses into the way they construct their knowledge about the world around them and themselves.

While, there is no standard framework for the analysis of narrative data, scholars such as Riessman (2003) offer researchers a potential framework that is aligned with the performance approach. According to Riessman (2003, p.8), in their analysis of narrative data, researchers could potentially ask the following questions:

Why was the narrative developed that way, and told in that order? In what kinds of stories does the narrator place him/herself? How does he/she strategically make preferred identity claims? What other identities are performed or suggested? What was the response of the listener/audience, and how did it influence the development of the narrative, and interpretation of it?

Through the use of these analytical questions, researchers can gain insights into the way people make sense of the world as well as the various identities they claim in different communicative settings. Hence, my analysis of the narrative data in this study utilizes both Davies and Harre’s (1990) ideas on subject positioning and Riessman’s (2003) performance approach as illustrated above.

3.5.3 Visual identities

Photographs are an invaluable resource on how people view themselves, make sense of their life experiences and claim their identities in a variety of social interactions. According to Pink (2007, p.82), images that are produced by research participants offer researchers insights into people’s
“personal experience, knowledge and wider cultural discourses.” However, when using visual ethnographic methods to collect data, Pink (2007, p.82) cautions that researchers should view their participants as more than a resource for data collection and consider “how informants use the content of the images as vessels in which to invest meanings and through which to produce and represent their knowledge, self-identities, experiences and emotions.” In my study, this is accomplished through the use of a novel research tool known as photovoice to obtain visual data provides information on the overseas study experience and the various identities claimed by international postgraduate students.

In keeping with this approach, participants in this study were asked to take photographs of their everyday lives using their mobile phone cameras. Prior to taking photographs, participants received training. They also received a set of questions, adapted from Lorenz (2010) to consider before taking photographs. The questions are as follows:

1. What is it like to live in Adelaide as an international postgraduate student?

2. What in my life or community has affected the way I live in Adelaide as an international postgraduate student?

3. What do I want to tell other people about living in Adelaide as an international postgraduate student?

4. How is my life different now from how it was before I left my country? What is better? What is worse?

Although there are many advantages to using photovoice as a research tool, it is important to note that the analysis and discussion of the photographs taken by participants can be challenging. However, Wang and Burris (1997, p.374) concede that "all methodologies hide as well as disclose." With that in mind, I unpack the photographs by engaging with the research
participants in a focus group session where they can frame their responses according to a 5 step inductive questioning process proposed by Streng et al. (2004, p. 405). I have adapted the process as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Introductory question</strong></th>
<th>Thank you for participating in this focus group session. Could you please select three photographs from your collection that you would like to share and discuss with the group?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition questions</strong></td>
<td>What do you see in this photograph? What is happening in this photograph? Why did you take this photograph?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key questions</strong></td>
<td>How does this photograph relate to your life as a research scholar? Why do these issues exist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ending question</strong></td>
<td>How has your experience today influenced your understanding of the issues highlighted? What can we do to address the issues that have been highlighted in our discussions today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final question</strong></td>
<td>Is there anything else that you would like to share or discuss in relation to the photographs presented today?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5 Adapted from Streng et al. (2004, p. 405)

In addition to participant narratives describing the images that they have produced, the analysis of photographs requires insights derived from academic literature. According to Pink (2007, 118), the analysis of photographs created by research participants entails “scrutinizing the relationship between meanings given to photographs [and video] during fieldwork, and academic meanings later invested in the same images.” This is the approach that I use in my study. After completing an audio recording of the narrative accounts by research participants on their photographs, I transcribe these accounts and categorize the data thematically. Next, I relate these emergent themes to academic literature. It is through the process of moving from autobiographical images produced by research participants to a broader reading informed by
academic literature that these images move from the realm of the personal to a rich commentary on how communities construct themselves, making photovoice a powerful research tool. Here, I utilize the reflexive approach to image analysis which posits “that it is impossible to record completed processes, activities or sets of relationships visually, and demands that attention be paid to the contexts in which images are produced” (Pink 2007, p.122). The reflexive approach is based on three broad assumptions namely that photographs are not complete depictions of events, the intentions of individuals who produce images need to be examined and the analysis should go beyond the images that are produced to a consideration of the various meanings attached to the images by different individuals (Pink 2007). In keeping with this view, other scholars such as such as Gillian Rose (2007, p.13) offer a possible strategy to analyse images by arguing that the analysis of images should consider the “sites” in which the images were created. These include the production of the image, the actual image itself and the ways in which it is considered by different audiences. Hence, the researcher needs to contemplate the issues surrounding image production, the details of what was presented in the images and relate this to the wider interpretation of audiences. To do so, Rose (2007, p.258) presents some questions for consideration. I have selected five questions from each “site” to illustrate this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image production</th>
<th>The image itself</th>
<th>The audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When and where was it made?</td>
<td>What are the components of the image and how are they arranged?</td>
<td>Where is the spectator positioned in relation to the components of the image?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who made it?</td>
<td>Where is the viewer’s eye drawn to in the image and why?</td>
<td>What relation does this produce between the image and its viewer’s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the social identities of the maker, the owner and the subject of the image?</td>
<td>What relationships are established between the components of the image visually?</td>
<td>Is more than one interpretation of the image possible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the relations between the maker, the owner and the subject? Does the genre of the image address these identities and relations of its production?</td>
<td>What do the different components of an image signify?</td>
<td>How do different audiences interpret this image?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once an examination of each site has been conducted, Rose (2007, p.13) observes that a critical commentary can be conducted by unpacking the “modalities” of each site. Here, Rose (2007, p.13) elaborates that a deeper exploration of each site can be achieved by asking relevant questions about the “technological, compositional [and] social” dimensions of images. In the following table, based on the observations of Rose (2007), I present the types of analyses required when exploring each modality. In this study, I use apply these modalities to my examination of both the web data and the photographs submitted by the research participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Type of image analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technological</td>
<td>Technologies that are used to augment images such as digital media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compositional</td>
<td>The “content, colour and spatial organization” of images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>The influence of “economic, social and political relations,”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7 Adapted from Rose (2007, p.13)

3.6 Data collection

The data source for this study consists of institutional web data and participant narratives. In the following sections, I present the data collection procedure.

3.6.1 Institutional web data

The institutional web data was collected between February and July 2012. The data was collected during this period because it signalled the beginning of the first semester of the year and provides a snapshot of life at the university for one semester. Hence, it would be interesting to unpack the ways in which the university and international postgraduate students are depicted to a wider audience. The discourses and images used would offer a glimpse into the values
upheld by the university. The data under consideration was obtained from the university website which is public domain and does not require ethics clearance.

3.6.2 Narrative data

This study uses focus groups to obtain data on international postgraduate student responses to messages contained in HE promotional media and their insights on the overseas study experience. The rationale for utilizing focus groups as opposed to interviews is due to the nature of focus groups which provides researchers with insights into how people respond as a group to a particular subject (Bertrand and Hughes 2005). It is the shared experiences, views, opinions and attitudes of international postgraduate students as a community that contributes to answering the research questions in this study.

Steeped in the tradition of participatory research, the aim of this study is to shed light on the experiences of a particular group of research participants as opposed to making wider generalizations. Therefore, it is essential to collect “information rich” data from focus group sessions that are characterised by in-depth discussions (Bertrand and Hughes 2005, p.65). In order to do so, Bloor et al. (2002, p.20) suggest recruiting participants who have similar backgrounds because participants who hold differing views could cause conflict and detract from obtaining rich data. In the event of conflict, they suggest running separate focus group sessions which would be more effective to obtain these contrasting views.

Focus group participants in this study were recruited purposively from a bridging program for international postgraduate students at the University of Adelaide through discussions and the issuing of fliers outlining the details of the study. During this recruitment session, consent forms, an information sheet and the complaints procedure were distributed to all participants. Participants who were willing to participate in the study were asked to bring the forms to the next session. The criteria for inclusion were age (20-45 years), course of study (postgraduate as
opposed to undergraduate), nationality (international as opposed to domestic students) and location (University of Adelaide).

The general consensus among focus group researchers is to limit the size of focus groups to between 6 to 8 participants (Bloor, Frankland et al. 2002). The rationale for this is the ease of managing the sessions and the space for participants to share their views without interruption or distractions. In the light of this, I conducted more than one focus group session to ensure that participants had ample opportunities to share their views according to their collective group experiences based on their individual cultural and national backgrounds.

During the focus group sessions, I acted as facilitator to the groups by providing prompts to begin the discussions. The prompts consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix 1) and visuals depicting relevant sections of the university website related to the postgraduate student demographic. These included the university home page, the international student page, the postgraduate student page and the university research page. All focus groups sessions were audio taped and the transcription of the sessions was conducted professionally. The data was then analysed using thematic content analysis to identify relevant themes that emerged.

3.7 Research method
As indicated above, CDA is relevant to an investigation of institutional identity and representation in HE promotional media because it allows the researcher to unpack the discourses and images used to position the various key players within a communicative context. In the following sections, I discuss my approach to the analysis of the institutional web data and the participant narratives.

3.7.1 Institutional web data
The broad aim of this study is to investigate how a university represents itself to prospective international postgraduate students in a selection of HE promotional media. One of the ways in
which a university interacts with prospective students is through maintaining and communicating its institutional identity. In this study, I apply Fairclough’s (1989, p.26) “three dimensions of discourse” to examine the way language is used by a university to represent its identity in its interactions with international postgraduate students. In the next chapter, I present the findings of this analysis according to the enduring and emergent themes that surface from my analysis.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), categories for analysis can be derived from theory, personal experience and the research objectives of the study. In this study, the categories of analysis consist of four distinct sections of the university website that are relevant to the international postgraduate student cohort. These sections include web pages encompassing the university homepage, the international student page, the postgraduate student page and the university research page. For each category, the findings are discussed and linked to the literature on postcolonial theory, CDA, media studies and the marketing of higher education. By approaching the data analysis in this way, Miles and Huberman (1994) affirm that the researcher will be able to examine interactions that are most relevant to their study as well as provide a clear framework for future researchers who intend to investigate the same phenomenon in other contexts. Thus, in my study, I collected web data related to the international postgraduate student demographic in order to answer questions on the types of discourses utilized by the university to convey its institutional identity and that of international postgraduate students.

3.7.2 Participant narratives

To obtain the responses of a cohort of international postgraduate students to a selection of HE promotional media, this study was carried out according to the following stages:

Stage 1: At the first focus group session, participants were invited to share their impressions on a selection of postgraduate promotional media and relevant sections of the university website,
which was projected onto a data screen to facilitate the discussion. The participants’ ideas and opinions were audio taped using a digital voice recorder.

**Stage 2:** Prior to leaving the first focus group session, participants were introduced to their next task which involved recording their experiences in relation to their overseas study experience using photovoice. This process involved taking photographs to visually depict their experiences as an international postgraduate student in an Australian university and writing their impressions next to each image. Training was provided during this session. Since photovoice involves taking photographs and some photographs may contain images of people, it is imperative that ethical guidelines are established early. Lorenz (2010, p.214) suggests making it clear to participants at the onset of the project that they “could photograph whatever they wanted as long as it did not depict illegal activities and they asked permission before taking a photograph of a person.” Goodhart et al. (2006, p.55) suggest that participants are made aware of “protecting privacy, not intruding into personal space, not placing someone in a false light, and not using a person’s likeness for commercial gain.” In accordance with this, the ethical considerations in relation to taking photographs in this study were carefully explained in the training session. In addition, ethics clearance was sought and successfully obtained from The University of Adelaide’s Office of Research Ethics, Compliance and Integrity. Besides the use of photovoice, participants were asked to produce a free narrative of the “story” of their journey to Australia as an international postgraduate student from the moment of contact with the university promotional media to their actual real-world experiences in relation to their overseas study experience. The instruction for the written task was as follows: “Write the story of your journey to Australia as an international postgraduate student from your initial exposure to the university promotional materials to your overseas study experience as a research scholar in an Australian university.” No instructions were given regarding content and document structure. I then analysed the narratives according to the performance approach to narrative analysis framework outlined by Riessman (2003). This
activity was completed two weeks after the first focus group session, allowing participants the time to reflect upon their experience without being too lengthy so as to disrupt their studies.

Stage 3: Participants brought their visual depictions of their overseas study experience to the follow up focus group session. In keeping with visual ethnography techniques outlined by Pink (2007, p.118-134), I invited participants to present their images to the rest of the group and convey their views. This session was audio taped using a digital voice recorder. This data was later juxtaposed next to the promotional media issued by the university to analyse the similarities and differences between the intended and received messages.

Stage 4: In this stage, I analysed the participant narratives that were completed in Stage 2. Through an analysis of the these narratives, I was able to identify the ways in which the participants make sense of their world through stories (Connelly and Clandinin 1990) and how their identities were “performed” and claimed, and why their “narratives developed in particular ways and were told in particular orders” (Riessman 2003, p.8).

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the research approach, design and methods that are suited to answering the research questions proposed in Chapter 1. Specifically, I demonstrate the relevance of a CDA approach to investigate the discourses and images that are used in a selection of HE promotional media to construct the university’s institutional identity. I also outline the performance approach to the analysis of narrative identities and the use of photovoice to explore the visual identities of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media. In the next chapter, I apply these innovative research methods to an investigation of the institutional identity of the university and how it is constructed in four key areas of the university website that are related to the international postgraduate student demographic namely the university home page, the international student page, the postgraduate student page and the university research page. I also analyse the ways in
which the university represents the identities of international postgraduate students within the context of the 7Ps of marketing studies.
Chapter 4: Representations of institutional and academic identities: insights from a university website

4.0 Introduction

HE promotional media is a vital resource utilized by universities to entice prospective students. As mentioned earlier, research on media representations of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media remains relatively unexplored. Previous studies on media representations of international students in the mainstream media indicate that this cohort are often depicted as victims of racial attacks or as a viable funding source capable of contributing to the national economy. In this chapter, I investigate media representations of international postgraduate students in a selection of online higher education promotional media at one Australian university. Specifically, I unpack the discourses and images used on the university website to convey the university’s institutional identity, the academic identities of international postgraduate students and the depiction of the overseas study experience. In doing so, I relate the data to three bodies of literature that provide insights on the study of media representations of minority groups and the identities they claim and perform in new environments. The literature that I use to inform my data analysis includes postcolonial theory, CDA and media studies. As indicated in Chapter 1, the broad aim of this study is to investigate how a university represents itself to prospective international postgraduate students in a selection of HE promotional media. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate that one of the ways in which a university interacts with prospective students is through maintaining and communicating its institutional identity. Therefore, in this chapter, the focus of my analysis is to offer a critical commentary on the types of interactions that occur within this distinctive social context.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, my categories of analysis are derived from four sections of the university website that are relevant to the international postgraduate student cohort. These sections include web pages encompassing the university homepage, the international student
page, the postgraduate student page and the university research page. For each category, enduring and emergent themes from the data are discussed and linked to the literature on postcolonial theory, CDA and media studies. Besides its relevance to the international postgraduate student demographic, these categories of analysis were selected because they could potentially offer insights on the phenomenon under investigation.

As mentioned earlier, an analysis of the textual practices that define these web pages could provide insights on the ways in which the university represents itself to prospective international postgraduate students. In keeping with Fairclough’s (1989) approach to discourse as a form of social practice, each section begins with a descriptive analysis taking into account the linguistic and visual features in the web pages (Level 1: Texts). This is then followed by a critical analysis whereby the descriptive analysis is expanded to comment on the interactions between the university and international postgraduate students (Level 2: Discourse Practice). As discussed in Chapter 3, this approach is well suited to a critical study on media representations of two powerfully incongruent groups because CDA allows the researcher to unearth the discourses and images that confront society in a range of media to reveal the way various groups are positioned.

Once the broad themes are identified from the university web pages, I conduct a close reading of each section, paying particular attention to how the institutional identity of the university is conveyed and whether these representations allow sufficient space for international postgraduate students to claim their identity as global researchers in a Western university. In my critical analysis of the descriptive data, I evaluate the types of ideologies that are utilized by the university, whose interests are prioritized and what the patterns of text production in the webpages disclose about the communicative context in which these texts are produced. Finally, in the third level of the dimensions of discourse, I assess the interactions within the social context by examining whether the discourses and images produced by the university contribute towards achieving its communicative goals (Level 3: Social Interactions). In short, a CDA of each category
of analysis in this study involves an analysis of texts, discourse practice and social interactions. This analysis would offer insights into the discourses and images used by the university to convey its institutional identity and the academic identities of international postgraduate students in a selection of HE promotional media. In addition to CDA, relevant sections of Gillian Rose’s (2007) framework for image analysis (see Chapter 3) is used to investigate the images within each category for analysis. Next, I discuss the stages of qualitative data analysis and touch on the literature that informs my approach to the analysis, presentation and discussion of the data.

4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative data analysis involves 3 stages namely “data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification” (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.10). These stages form part of an iterative process which takes place from the beginning of the research project until the end.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10), data reduction involves “selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data.” They point out that the researcher’s choice of research questions determines the rationale for carrying out all of the above steps. Hence, in my study I collected web data from a university website that was targeted specifically to the international postgraduate student cohort in order to examine the types of discourses and images that conveyed the interactions between this cohort and the university.

In the data display stage, Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that data needs to be presented to people in a manner that is comprehensible because humans are by nature inclined to process large chunks of information in a smaller discernible volume. To do this, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that researchers present their data as “matrices, graphs, charts and networks.” In this study, I present instances of the web data in varied formats such as screen shots and tables in order to communicate the research findings in a manner that is clear and cohesive.
Finally, in the third stage, which is conclusion drawing or verification, Miles and Huberman (1994, p.11) urge researchers to unpack the data by “noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions.” Other scholars such as Thomas (2009, p.198), state that this stage of the analysis involves examining the data for ideas or patterns that are interconnected or separate. These rich insights lend depth and value to the data analysis and underscore the value of qualitative research. However, Thomas (2009) cautions that it is not enough to merely present ideas that are interconnected or divergent but to also discuss the motivations behind these patterns. In my study, I approach this stage of the data analysis by relating my findings to the literature on postcolonial theory, CDA and media studies. Additionally, as indicated in Chapter 3, my analysis of both the web data and participant narratives is based on sound methodological approaches advocated by researchers in the field of CDA, narrative and visual analysis.

In the following sections I present the data analysis according to the categories of analysis namely the university homepage, the international student page, the postgraduate student page and the university research page.

4.2 The university homepage

Research has shown that organizations today work tirelessly to create websites that promote communication and establish relationships between them and their audience (McAllister-Spooner 2009; Callison and Seltzer 2010). Universities are no different in their pursuit to capture the attention of their audience, in this case, prospective students. According to Callahan (2005), the homepage of an organization serves as a powerful web advertising tool. In the case of universities, Callahan (2005) argues that universities could potentially tap into the international student market by presenting an international identity, enhancing web interactivity and promoting
customer satisfaction. By adhering to the above principles, a university has in its sights, the tools to exert an edge over its competitors.

Besides examining the larger function of how the homepage interacts within its context, it is equally important to explore its form and content. Scholars such as Hyland (2012, p.312) describe university homepages as a unique “media format in which form is as important as content.” This is significant because Hyland (2012, p.312) indicates that homepages are infused with material that is not only presented linguistically “but also visually through images, page layout and colour.” In my study, I analyse these features using CDA, narrative and visual analysis to unearth the “form” and “content” depicted in the homepage. My analysis of “form” and “content” enables me to identify the ways in which institutional and academic identities are constructed in a selection of HE promotional media at one university. As Hyland (2012) observes, the homepage is now viewed as a vital resource that offers researchers insights about identity. Unlike other data sources such as interviews, the homepage “can be regularly updated to reflect latest self-conceptions”, presenting researchers with a more authentic portrayal of identity (Hyland 2011, p.287). This is consistent with a postmodern view of identity as fluid and open to reinvention (Hall 2003).

In the following sections, I examine the discourses and images utilized on the university homepage to represent both institutional and academic identities to a wider audience and discuss them thematically. The data was sourced from the university website over a period of 6 months beginning February 2012.

4.2.1 CDA: Text, discourse practice and social interactions

Theme 1: Research excellence
An examination of the university homepage in this study reveals that the focus appears to be on courses for study and research. This is evident from the hyperlinks on the homepage that lead to the aptly titled “Study in Adelaide” and “Research at Adelaide” links (see Figure 1). Here, the university signals to its audience that its core business consists of teaching and research. In short, the product as articulated by Jonathan Ivy (2008) in his 7Ps of marketing higher education is clearly delineated here and offered to the audience. Hence, prospective students can search for a course through the conveniently placed search engine labelled “Degree Finder” and find themselves quickly transported to the degree or subject area that they wish to pursue. Alternatively, for a research active audience there is a link to “Research at Adelaide” which immediately transports them to current research at the university.

![ degreesearch.png](attachment:degreesearch.png)

**Figure 1.** Screenshot of the university homepage dated 13 February 2012. Copyright in this website and its contents is owned by, or licensed to, the University of Adelaide.

While the homepage is defined by the two core areas, namely study and research, the type of discourse that is privileged on the homepage is that of research excellence. This can be seen in the use of phrases such as “$1 million funding for food security research”, “conference on
housing issues”, “more than 250 housing experts from around the world”, “Food security 2050” and “Research Tuesdays.” Is it interesting to note that the word “research” appears a total of 5 times on the homepage, signalling to potential researchers that their expertise will be welcome should they choose to further their education at the university. Also, the emphasis on research indicates to the audience that the university’s identity is one that is closely intertwined with research excellence, making it a premier destination for experts from around the world. Hence, it is clear that the primary concern of the university in terms of its focus and institutional identity is one that centres on research.

In addition to a concerted focus on research in the homepage, another strategy employed by the university to claim its identity as a research intensive university is through a number of value justification statements on the types of research conducted at the university. This is evident in the way in which the magnitude of funding sourced by researchers at the university is vividly emphasized as seen in the phrase “$1 million for food security research.” Here, the audience is drawn to the prestige associated with being a part of the research agenda at the university. This agenda is clearly captured and presented in the format of a web marketing tool on the homepage itself.

The discourse of research excellence is also conveyed through phrases associated with urgency. For example, on the homepage, the types of research underway is described as work that addresses matters of “security” in terms of current investigations into food security issues. With reference to concerns associated with housing, the research is described as addressing what the university perceives as a “looming” crisis. Another area of research that is prominently captured on the homepage comes from the field of medicine and is related to work carried out to combat Irritable Bowel Syndrome which is described as a condition that is characterised by “chronic pain.” By touching on a sense of urgency and the need to curtail current problems that exist in a range of fields from food studies to health issues, the university presents its identity as
one of a problem solver in a world that is under a host of threats. The overall effect of such an institutional representation is one that leaves the audience with a sense of awe. Not only is the audience left with admiration for the types of research already being conducted but also a longing to expand on their academic identities in order to be a part of such an illustrious organization. This echoes the ideas posited by Waters and Brooks (2011, p.573) who point to the “geographical imaginaries” of prospective students in search of an international education. Other scholars such as Appadurai (1996, p.3) also comment on this when he states that the media has a significant impact on “the work of the imagination.” In the case of HE promotional media, it is apparent that the use of selected discourses to promote particular institutional and academic identities using the medium of a university’s home page could possibly tap into the imagination of students seeking an international education.

Besides the interdiscursive strategy of positioning research value and urgency to convey the discourse of research excellence, the university also uses the strategy of conveying research prestige to construct its identity. This is evident in the use of the term “major” to describe the type of conference being held to discuss housing issues. Also, research on housing is advertised in relation to its impact on the 21st century. Here, research is presented as having far reaching consequences not only in the short term but also in the long term.

Another strategy used to convey research prestige is by highlighting the demand for knowledge through the platform of research presentations organized by the university. This is evident on the home page where the Food Security event is depicted as “EVENT BOOKED OUT.” Here, the audience is able to sense the appeal of current research projects as well as the prestige factor in that it is well received by the university community as evidenced by their willingness to attend the event. Overall, this thirst for information underscores the connection and relevance between researchers and the public, indicating that the research resonates beyond the gates of the university to the community at large.
Theme 2: Cultural life

Besides a focus on research excellence, another theme that is evident in the data is the emphasis on the cultural life of the city of Adelaide. The university homepage dated 27 February 2012 features a spectacular annual event that occurs in Adelaide, which is the Adelaide Fringe festival (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Screenshot of the university homepage dated 27 February 2012. Copyright in this website and its contents is owned by, or licensed to, the University of Adelaide.

Using the caption “It's Festival Time!” the homepage beckons prospective students to consider the lifestyle that awaits them should they pursue their studies at the university. While the core business of the university is teaching and research, there is also an attempt to embed the idea of a rich cultural life into the institutional identity of the university. Also, the notion of cultural life is presented as a characteristic that is closely linked to the city in which the university is located within. Here, the overall effect is the selling of a lifestyle to prospective students. There are several instances in the data where the university homepage conveys the idea of cultural life to its
audience. Another example can be seen in the university homepage dated 26 March 2012 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Screenshot of the university homepage dated 26 March 2012. Copyright in this website and its contents is owned by, or licensed to, the University of Adelaide.

The above screen shot depicts an upcoming musical performance dubbed as “The 2012 Masterclass Series” where “international musicians of the highest standing” will perform at the university. Here, the institutional identity of the university is conveyed in the dimension of “expression” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.116) through the use of collocations. By describing the musicians as being of the “highest standing,” the university positions itself as a prestigious organization where only the best would be invited to participate in cultural activities. Hence, the overall effect is one where the audience is made aware at the onset that quality is a key factor in the identity that is claimed and performed by the university. As Bhatia (2005) notes, one of the key rhetorical moves utilized by organizations in their promotional discourse is to establish credentials. In the above example, it is evident that the university ties its identity to those whose
credentials are well-established, signalling to its audience that it is firmly placed in the company of
only the very best.

Another example where the theme of cultural life is conveyed on the university homepage is
evident on 16 April 2012 as shown in the screen shot below (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Screenshot of the university homepage dated 16 April 2012. Copyright in this website
and its contents is owned by, or licensed to, the University of Adelaide.

Here, in the dimension of “representation” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.116), the university
claims its institutional identity through the discourse strategy of identification. This strategy is
employed by aligning the university’s institutional identity with that of a renowned local or
international personality. Here, the university has selected a well-known Australian musician who
has achieved global success and whose name speaks volumes in relation to his credentials and
success. This strategy of identification has benefits for the university because it signals to the
audience that the university has links with the wider Australian arts community, making it a
suitable destination for study as well as creating connections beyond academic study. In short,
the strategy of identification to represent the university’s institutional identity provides evidence of
its commitment to offering students a rich cultural life. By presenting students with a rich cultural lifestyle, the university signals to students that they not only have opportunities to further their academic studies but to also enhance their cultural knowledge as a result of an international education. This is significant in that it makes for an outstanding overseas study experience for international postgraduate students. Here, the underlying message to international postgraduate students is that they not only achieve their research goals but also claim their identities as global citizens. In short, it is interesting to note that the university, through its identification with the broader cultural community, has seamlessly blended its institutional identity from that of research excellence to that of a rich cultural life.

**Theme 3: Science and technology**

While there are explicit references on the university homepage to the cultural life of the city, there is also a strong emphasis on the pursuit of scientific knowledge. This can be seen from an analysis of research projects featured on the university homepage over a period of 6 months (see Figure 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Research project description</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 February 2012</td>
<td>Research on Irritable Bowel Syndrome</td>
<td>Health Sciences (Medicine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 March 2012</td>
<td>String theory and the quest for quantum space time</td>
<td>Sciences (Physics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 March 2012</td>
<td>Relationship between words and music</td>
<td>Humanities (Linguistics)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 March 2012</td>
<td>Research on durum wheat</td>
<td>Sciences (Agriculture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 March 2012</td>
<td>Diabetes research</td>
<td>Health Sciences (Medicine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 March 2012</td>
<td>Legal rights to the River Murray</td>
<td>Professions (Law)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 March 2012</td>
<td>HIV research</td>
<td>Health Sciences (Medicine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 April 2012</td>
<td>Pregnancy and unnecessary induction</td>
<td>Health Sciences (Medicine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 April 2012</td>
<td>The revival of extinct and endangered languages</td>
<td>Humanities (Linguistics)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 April 2012</td>
<td>Quality of hospital service</td>
<td>Health Sciences (Medicine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 May 2012</td>
<td>Birth defects and assisted reproduction</td>
<td>Health Sciences (Medicine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 May 2012</td>
<td>Genomics and conservation</td>
<td>Sciences (Biomedical Science)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 May 2012</td>
<td>Breast cancer genes</td>
<td>Health Sciences (Medicine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 June 2012</td>
<td>The use of computer science to solve complex human problems</td>
<td>Sciences (Computer Science)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 July 2012</td>
<td>Child birth and twins</td>
<td>Health Sciences (Medicine)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the above analysis, it is clear that a total of 13 research projects from the Sciences were showcased as opposed to only 3 from other disciplines. Through this focus on scientific research, the university claims its institutional identity under the dimension of “representation” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.116) through the strategy of identification. By presenting an institutional identity that is deeply tied to advances in the Sciences, the university offers strong evidence to its audience that it is indeed an institution that is at the forefront of cutting edge solutions to global problems. This effect is also achieved through the discourse of problem solver as seen in the screen shot below (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. Research projects on the university homepage from 13 February to 30 July 2012

Figure 6. Screenshot of the university homepage dated 16 April 2012. Copyright in this website and its contents is owned by, or licensed to, the University of Adelaide.

Here, the university offers a snapshot of a research project in Computer Sciences where the work underway is directly positioned as an attempt “to solve complex human problems.” Thus, the overall effect in terms of the depiction of its institutional identity is one that underscores the vital role played by the university in providing solutions not just at a local level but also at a global level.
Far from being a passive provider of educational services, the university, through the use of powerful imagery and the discourse of problem solver, claims its identity as an active participant responding to challenges facing the world.

4.3 The international student page

At present, there is limited work exploring the role of the international student web page in relation to construction and representation of the university’s institutional identity and the academic identities of international postgraduate students. Previous work, as mentioned in Chapter 1, has only examined university prospectuses from the perspective of genre characteristics and linguistic features. These studies have relied on the print media as data sources and largely omitted the university website as a rich resource depicting the complex interactions between the university and this student demographic. This is a restrictive approach because the international student page is one of the crucial ways in which the university engages with prospective international students who access the university’s website. In terms of its role, the international student page is of interest to prospective international students who seek information about the academic and non-academic activities of the university. By accessing the ways in which the university presents itself to the world, prospective international students are left with a vivid impression of the overall overseas study experience at a particular university.

4.3.1 CDA: Text, discourse practice and social interactions

Theme 1: Best value

In this study, the international student page reflected content that addressed the value of studying at the university specifically and Adelaide as the premier education destination in general. The text highlighted the range of courses available, how to apply for these courses, the associated costs, accommodation and scholarships available. In addition to these core topics, there were strategically placed hyperlinks which led prospective students to topics such as “Cost and
Finance”, “Student Support”, “Campus Life”, “Events” and “Publications.” Each of these links then led to detailed information for students who choose to investigate these topics further. Overall, this is a tactical move on the part of the university to ensure that all content satisfies their “information hungry” customers and more importantly underscores the value of studying at the university as opposed to their competitors. Reflected in the screenshot below (see Figure 7) is a well-crafted, tightly structured snapshot encapsulating the overseas study experience in terms of its multicultural student demographic and the enticing natural landscape of the wide sandy beaches that are the trademark of Adelaide. In the screenshot below, one can also discern the representative images of young people from neighbouring Asian countries as evidenced in the image of the young woman dressed in a pink hijab possibly from Malaysia or Indonesia. The other image is of a woman with “Oriental” features resembling the ethnic composition of people who are probably from neighbouring China, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. In addition to Australia’s closest neighbours the university also captures the image of a potentially vital and fast growing market which is the African student population. Hence, the image captures prospective students from distinct cultural backgrounds representing target markets that are important to the university. Additionally, the image presents a preview of the multicultural multi-ethnic campus that awaits prospective students should they choose to study at the university. This message is further compounded with the caption that precedes the images which highlights the discourse typical of someone seeking success and achievement: “The University of Adelaide ranks in the top 1% of universities in the world and can help you to make your impact in the world.”
The theme of best value is also invoked through the use of an embedded video featuring a student detailing her overseas study experience. The use of embedded videos by organizations promoting a particular product, service or political message is no longer the exception (Freeman and Chapman 2007; Keenan and Shiri 2009; Lilleker and Malagon 2010). In fact, it is becoming increasingly common to utilize a range of media as part of the promotional discourse conveying an organization's brand identity to the wider public. Hence, on the international student page, prospective students are able to obtain firsthand knowledge of a previous student's experience presented in her own words. The overall effect of this move creates in the reader a sense of warmth and comfort similar to a close friend sharing their personal journey to a destination that one has only begun to be considered in the imagination. Since the video as a medium is engaging and authentic, the reader is drawn towards the content and feels a sense of closeness with the subject. By using a student testimonial, the university speaks directly to students from the perspective of another student, blurring the lines of product promotion to one of close confidant. This move is well known in the promotional genres as “endorsement and testimonials” (Bhatia...
(2005, p.214) and successfully achieves the goal of product endorser where product credibility is created and maintained. This move validates Fairclough’s (1995) earlier observation that the marketization of universities has resulted in a concerted and determined media campaign to construct the university as commercially attractive to potential customers.

The strategy of presenting the idea of best value and success with images representing the identities of prospective students from Asian and African cultural backgrounds highlights the university’s acute awareness of the importance that these cultures place on education. Here, knowledge is constructed as a marketable commodity that can be bought and sold. Consistent with Said’s (1978) view of knowledge as a source of power and social mobility, knowledge on this page is packaged and sold as an entity that has the power to transform lives and hence, change the future of people and communities. The representation of knowledge as a powerful commodity is evoked through the strategy of a rhetorical question and answer as evidenced in the line: “Want to study and get a degree from one of Australia’s best universities?” In the following line, the answer is immediately provided: “The University of Adelaide ranks in the top 1% of universities in the world and can help you make your impact on the world.” Here, the pursuit and attainment of knowledge is constructed as an entity that possesses great value and prestige. This is achieved through the invocation of the university’s esteemed position as a leading educational provider. The subject who is in search of knowledge is spoken to directly through the use of the personal pronoun “you” whereby the reader is made to feel that excellence is within reach through the legacy of the work that they produce as a result of studying at the university. Thus, the international student is page is a vital resource in driving the university’s agenda to not only capture the international student market but to also do so by tapping into the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of prospective students.

In short, I see the international student page operating in a similar manner to any large corporation seeking to win the attention of their discerning audience. In the case of universities
and prospective international students, core content related to finance, support, lifestyle, accommodation and events are successfully collated and offered to prospective students in an attractive visual and textual format that signifies the key thematic consideration of best value. Thus, the international student page has the immense power to speak directly to the international student cohort who approaches the university website with their hopes and dreams of an overseas study experience. From the comfort of their home, they are seductively drawn towards a vision of what life could be like should they make their move to a new learning environment in a Western country that has the potential to lift them towards great success. The overall discursive effect of knowledge as power echoes Said’s (1978) observations that knowledge in the West is often constructed as transformational, meaning that knowledge is perceived as a powerful factor in transforming societies and communities towards modernity and development. He states that the West frames knowledge in this manner through the strategic positioning of two opposing ideas in the form of asymmetrical binaries. In the realm of knowledge, the East is constructed as backward as opposed to the modernity of the West, highlighting this scenario of opposites or binaries. Therefore, Said points out, the way forward for the deficient East would be though the pursuit and attainment of knowledge through a Western educational paradigm. This pattern is apparent today in the way that Western universities utilize hard data such as the QS and Times Higher Education rankings featuring their position in global rankings on their web page so as to tap into the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of students from non-Western backgrounds. It is hoped that by doing so, prospective students from non-Western backgrounds would be propelled towards satisfying their notions of success as it is defined and marketed by those who dominate the international media.

**Theme 2: Nature**

Besides the theme of best value, the idea of Nature (capitalized to indicate Nature as a concept or philosophy) is expertly captured on the international student page as a powerful element in
enriching the overseas study experience. Under the heading, “Why Adelaide?” the stunning image of the pristine clean beach and relaxing bodies dotted against the landscape leaves the reader with the impression of an attractive beach holiday set in a spectacular tourist destination (see Figure 7). Researchers such as Askehave (2007) have commented that there is a strong push by universities today to design brochures that increasingly mirror the glossy tourist brochures that one would peruse at the travel agent. This blurring of boundaries between educational provider and overseas study experience provider is a key element that defines the way the university constructs its identity and that of prospective students in the international student page. Today, the university as an institution has to not only claim its academic identity as a top performer by citing its international ranking position but also tap into the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of prospective students. Hence, one of the ways in which the university does that is by juxtaposing images of the natural landscape together with performance orientated discourse glorifying the university ranking and hinting at promises of future success should the student make the decision to further their education at the university. This clever interweaving of competing discourses and contrasting images is a subtle yet powerful rhetorical move on the part of the university to maintain its identity as a quality education provider while simultaneously tapping into the expectations of an overseas student market that hungers for a different study experience from the one that they would otherwise be exposed to should they have remained within the confines of their home country.
The influence of Nature in constructing the overseas study experience is visible in the embedded video depicting a student testimonial on the international student page. The video (see Figure 8) features a smiling student extolling the joys of studying at the university against the backdrop of the luscious green landscape. Interestingly, a video lauding the benefits of studying at a world renowned university is situated within the natural vistas surrounding the university instead of a snapshot of a student speaking in a lecture hall. Here, the focus is not on academic prowess but more importantly, the aim of this video is to convey the lifestyle that awaits prospective students. This strategy of blending Nature with the overseas study experience is a powerful move because it shows prospective international students that their overseas study experience goes beyond academic success to include an inspiring lifestyle framed by scenic vistas, creating a unique study experience. This phenomenon has been observed by scholars such as Waters and Brooks (2011) who found in their conversations with UK students embarking on their journey to a US university that media images of the natural landscape created a sense of expectation and anticipation for a particular kind of lifestyle that they found quite appealing.
Hence, the link between Nature and the university’s construction of its identity as both a quality educational provider and an outstanding location for study is one that cannot be understated.

Theme 3: Asian focus

One of the overarching features of the international student page that became increasingly evident during the analysis was the discursive structure of overt references to Asia and the Asian international student. The university’s focus on giving prominence to the Asian student market can be viewed as a concerted effort in meeting the Australian national policy of building solid ties with countries in the region. This policy has been given a new lease of life under the former Labour government culminating in their Asian Century paper whereby it has been stated that Australia’s focus in the coming century would be increasing engagement with its Asian neighbours in the key areas of trade and education (Government 2012). In addition to that, the focus on Asia is also a result of strong historical and geographical links whereby large numbers of students from neighbouring Asian countries have had a long standing relationship with Australia by virtue of selecting Australia as they preferred higher education destination. These historical, geographical and political links are successfully built upon and feature prominently in the international student page through the strategy of embedding a sister site in Mandarin script for the Chinese student market (see Figure 7). Hence, with a click of the mouse, Chinese students who log into the international student page will be transported to a webpage in Mandarin Chinese which signals to them that the university has taken into account their linguistic and cultural needs. Here, the university has successfully bridged the cultural divide where, in the past, only those who shared a Western cultural paradigm were part of the conversation on higher education and its virtues. Here, the university, through its sister site in Mandarin Chinese makes it explicitly clear that a key Asian market will not be left of the conversation. Hence, through this move, students who may not possess the cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977) to engage with Western-dominated higher education promotional media, still have the opportunity to make choices about an
overseas study experience by perusing the university’s sister site which is tailored to meet their linguistic and cultural needs. While this is a smooth tactical move in relation to capturing a prominent Asian market, one cannot help but wonder if the other Asian giant, India, would also someday receive a sister site of their own in their national language? Interestingly, the data revealed that the discourses and images associated with the Asian market on the international students page tends to lean heavily on celebrating and welcoming prospective students from an East Asian background. This is apparent from discernible images of prospective students with “Oriental” features. However, students of a South Asian background do not appear to receive prominence at this stage.

4.4 The postgraduate student page

The postgraduate student page is an important resource that provides a combination of academic and non-academic content that would be of interest to prospective and current postgraduate students at the university.

4.4.1 CDA: Text, discourse practice and social interactions

Theme 1: Best value

From the onset the postgraduate student page invoked key content related to administrative procedures centred on application procedures for courses as well as the types of courses on offer. Remarkably, the previously identified theme of best value also pervades the postgraduate student page in the form of study options for prospective students. While the international student page focused heavily on the stunning lifestyle awaiting prospective students, in this page the thematic consideration of best value is extended to capture the endless study possibilities available to students who would have otherwise given up on pursuing their postgraduate education. Here, the university claims its identity as a leader in the digital age where postgraduate study options
available are expanded to include a variety of study modes from online, face to face to remote access. This move, known as “detailing the product or service” Bhatia (2005, p.214) is strategic in that the university from the very beginning not only presents the product but also makes the product accessible to a diverse audience knowing full well that at the postgraduate level, prospective students would be seeking a variety of study modes due to the demands of being a mature age student. This notion of “mature age student” goes beyond one’s chronological age to encapsulate the life-stage of students who may be pursuing their postgraduate studies from their early 20s to 40. While relatively young, these students have achieved great academic success. However, they could also be moving into a life-stage where they would now be looking at options for further study while still being able to juggle the demands of perhaps raising a family or pursuing a career while studying part-time. In order to meet the varied demands of this niche market, the university has to make a compelling case as to why it would be in the best interest of this unique market to pursue their postgraduate studies at the university. Thus, the rhetorical move utilized by the university to achieve this, which is the “offering incentives” move (Bhatia 2005, p.214) is designed specifically to entice prospective customers by making what might appear overwhelming, achievable by bringing to the surface the variety of “incentives” or study options available to them.
Figure 8. Screenshot of the postgraduate student page dated 13 February 2012. Copyright in this website and its contents is owned by, or licensed to, the University of Adelaide.

Figure 9. Screenshot of the postgraduate student page dated 13 February 2012. Copyright in this website and its contents is owned by, or licensed to, the University of Adelaide.
Theme 2: Ideal destination

Concurrent with the promotional genre and the framework outlined by Jonathan Ivy (2008) in his 7Ps of marketing higher education (see page 94, Chapter 3), the postgraduate student page presents a snapshot of what makes this university the ideal destination of choice for students who are interested in completing a postgraduate degree. This aspect of the promotional genre is evident under the rhetorical question, “Why Adelaide?” (see Figure 8 and 9) where vital content is highlighted and promoted as the key selling points of the university. For example, there are specific references to topics such as “Quality”, “Staff”, “Facilities”, “Prestige” “Location” and “Support.” Here, shades of a tourist information brochure surface as the university constructs its identity as the outstanding destination of choice for discerning students in search of postgraduate study options. This observation is well documented in the literature as can be seen from Askehave’s (2007) observation that universities today are intent on presenting their identity as the ideal study experience destination instead of focusing on matters related to academic merits. In my view, this approach by universities is no longer a rarity but the norm largely because prospective students are now impacted by the global media and thus have very clear expectations of what they want from an overseas university education. Waters and Brooks (2011, p.573) point out that the “geographical imaginaries” of students affects their decisions on international education. As they argue, the role of the media, in particular movies and television have created expectations in the minds of students who seek a different experience. This is clearly illustrated in the observations of a student in their study who states:

You’ve always heard about those unis if you like either films or on the TV or news and all that … Brown [University] was an interesting one because it actually came to my attention through the TV, which was a bit odd. I didn’t know about Brown before having watched The OC [US drama series], to be honest. You get an insight into the college, really, even though it’s like a fictional presentation … and I was like, ‘oh wow, that seems like a cool place.” (Waters and Brooks 2011, p. 573)
Here, the link between the media and student expectations is one that is strong enough to trigger powerful feelings of longing to experience what a prospective student would deem as the ideal overseas study experience. This feeling has parallels to that of a tourist who looks through brochures of a desirable holiday destination. In short, the media plays a significant role in drawing prospective students to their university of choice and universities have begun to utilize this channel of communication so as to satisfy the longing in the “geographical imaginaries” (Waters and Brooks 2011, p.573) of potential students. It is precisely for this reason that the postgraduate students’ page not only addresses issues related to academic processes and procedures but also attempts to capture the non-academic aspects of the overseas student experience such as lifestyle, accommodation, student support, events and scholarships that are available.

**Theme 3: Science and technology**

While the discourses associated with the postgraduate student page construct the university as the choice study destination with the best value in relation to quality education and student experience, a visual analysis of the page reveals that the dominant theme running through the page focuses on the university’s outstanding achievement in the field of science and technology. A number of images featured scenes of students in white lab coats, conducting medical experiments, working collaboratively with other researchers in labs and profiles of experts in the fields of science and technology. Clearly, this is a strategy on the part of the university to claim its identity as a leading innovator in the sciences. The use of explicit imagery privileging the Sciences and the pursuit of scientific knowledge is celebrated and featured prominently on the postgraduate student page revealing the university’s efficient use of the rhetorical move of “establishing credentials” Bhatia (2005, p.214). Through the showcase of scientific research activity, the university signals to prospective postgraduate students that a rich and rewarding research study experience awaits them should they pursue their studies in the Sciences at the university.
4.5 The university research page

The university research page articulates research events, links to industry, prominent research centres within the university and showcases research expertise in the format of a snapshot of university staff and their current research. In short, the university research page is constructed with the aim of conveying the notion of research excellence by tapping into the key themes of expertise, architecture and history. Each of these themes is elaborated below.

4.5.1 CDA: Text, discourse practice and social interactions

Theme 1: Expertise

The idea of research expertise is constructed within the university research page in the form of powerful visual imagery depicting researchers complete in their white lab coats instructing students (see Figures 9 and 10 below). Another image depicts two researchers in close discussion as they pore over a computer while discussing their work. Yet another image successfully captures a snapshot of a university staff member under the heading “Find an Expert.” The university and students are constructed as active, determined and dedicated to their cause namely finding solutions for the problems that they are researching. The idea of research expertise is tied closely to the notion of community through images of collaboration and discourses that celebrate interaction and dissemination of research. This comes through effectively in the “Research Tuesdays” advertisement in Figure 9 which is labelled, “Research Tuesdays – Sharing Great Research with the Community." With this phrase, the university constructs research expertise as a commodity that is to be shared with the wider public for the benefit of all. This is indeed a stark contrast from previous generations of Western universities that often positioned themselves as the bastions of knowledge where this knowledge was held under lock and key amidst a small, exclusive group of experts. As Said (1993) argues, the West has utilized knowledge as a tool that could be used to subjugate less dominant societies.
However, in the media constructions of knowledge in this study, the data revealed that the overarching pattern is one whereby knowledge is packaged and presented in a format that is not only celebrated but also to be shared by all.

Figure 9. Screenshot of the university research page dated 13 February 2012. Copyright in this website and its contents is owned by, or licensed to, the University of Adelaide.
In addition to powerful imagery depicting active researchers at work, the university research page is also saturated with strong textual content which captures the accolades and achievements of various research groups. This is evident under the “Research News” section (see Figure 10) which makes the authoritative proclamation: “New unit to tackle Australia’s ‘silent epidemic’” Here, the language utilized is one that is in keeping with the rhetoric of the promotional discourse (Fairclough 1995; Bhatia 2005) which touts the accomplishments of key players within an organization and presents this information to potential customers so as to capture their attention and build a sense of longing within them. In the university research page, the target audience consists of potential researchers and the fact that the university presents a smorgasbord of outstanding research success stories on one webpage not only solidifies its identity as a promoter of research excellence but also one that makes the pursuit of this excellence accessible to all. This is consolidated in the line, “Our research programs offer outstanding opportunities to researchers and students from across the world, eager to learn and work at one of Australia’s most respected institutions.” Hence, the university claims its identity as
one that offers a level playing field for all with the sole intention of drawing the truly talented to work collaboratively to achieve exceptional outcomes for the good of all. Yet again, this is in opposition to the ideas of postcolonial theorists such as Said (1978) who chastised Western institutions of education for their monopoly on knowledge. In this study, the data revealed that constructions of Western scientific knowledge was framed along the lines of international collaboration and the engagement of deserving individuals regardless of where they come from. In short, the new world order for research excellence in content that permeates higher education promotional media appears to be one that echoes the ideas of Bhabha (1990b, p.211) who points to the “third space” where identities are in state of flux and would need to be adapted in accordance to the changes in one’s world. Here, the changing nature of knowledge and accessibility to knowledge paves the way for those from diverse backgrounds to come together and work for the common good of all. Most importantly, through the use of the promotional discourses, the university has successfully claimed its identity as the unique channel through which international collaborations by researchers of diverse backgrounds could be made a reality.

Theme 2: Architecture
As shown in the screenshot above (see Figure 11), the university showcases images of its glorious past through the use of a photo montage celebrating its colonial architecture. The use of majestic buildings from a previous era on the university website adheres closely to the move of “establishing credentials” which is evident in the promotional genres as identified by Bhatia (2005, p.214). The visually powerful strategy of utilizing modern technology to invoke images of an organization’s successful past demonstrates to prospective visitors to their website that the organization has indeed survived the test of time and would possibly have the staying power to go the distance in a new environment. As demonstrated in Figure 11, the university signals to prospective students that the campus is dotted with what it refers to as “Research Precincts” which connotes the idea of wide open spaces that stretch endlessly with the sole purpose of providing researchers with the ideal work environment. The images and the discourses at work create a sense of freedom whereby the old and the new are presented side by side to convey the core values that are embedded in the university’s institutional identity. As an organization, the university claims its identity as one that is steeped in tradition but at the same time, fluid enough to embrace the complexities of the brave new world in which it is currently located. This is potently communicated to prospective students in the university’s research page: “With its main campus located in the centre of the city of Adelaide, the University extends across five campuses, where grand old buildings combine with modern research facilities.” Here, the “old” and the “new” are presented as two entities that are intricately linked and can work in harmony to manifest future successes. This is in direct contrast to Said’s (1978) observations of a structure of hierarchical binaries where two opposing ideas or characteristic are highlighted in order to celebrate the superiority of one and denigrate the other. Instead, in the university’s representation of its architectural splendour, the past and the present exist in harmony and one entity is not seen
as better than the other. Instead, by touching on the rich connections between the past and present, the university presents the endeavour of research as a vocation that evolves along a continuum originating from past success as it moves forward to embrace new achievements.

In contrast to other studies that highlight the static nature of old buildings in the promotional brochures created by institutions of education (Askehave 2007; Wilkins 2012), in this study, the use of colonial architecture appears to be in harmony with current scientific developments. The university proudly displays its connection to the past while simultaneously showcasing its current scientific endeavours. This is a very forward reaching approach where old buildings not only communicate “a sense of structure, history and grandeur, in particular, a desire for a past order of social relationships” as observed by (Wilkins 2012, p.80) but also co-exist with the new to create a flexible identity that can and will adopt with a world that is changing at an increasingly fast pace.

**Theme 3: Achievements**

The link between the past, present and future also pervades the university research page within the domain of outstanding achievements by individuals associated with the university. These achievements are celebrated and featured on the university research page (see Figure 12) where a photo montage of Nobel Laureates is presented, invoking past successes with the intention of encouraging current and future endeavours.
As the university research page articulates, “The University of Adelaide has a long history of ground breaking research and scholarship of international significance and five Nobel Laureates have been associated with the University.” By showcasing the achievements of past scholars, the university claims its identity as one that possesses a strong sense of continuity within the realm of academic success. This is achieved discursively through the juxtaposition of images and textual information on each Nobel Laureate from their respective disciplines. For instance, the profiling of each Nobel Laureate begins with a short biography, followed by their academic achievements and ends with a write up on how their discoveries contributed to their discipline specifically and the world, in general. This move demonstrates to prospective students that the university as an institution is progressive and that this progress which began in the past, has indeed received international recognition by a world renowned external authority such as the governing body for the Nobel Prize. This is important because, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006) point out, when an institution invokes the endorsement of an external authority, it bestows credibility and also
highlights the strong connections that the institution has with external gate keepers. It is precisely these types of connections that are vital to the survival of an institution in the eyes of an ever discerning public. Additionally, by highlighting its connection with the Nobel Foundation on its research page, the university, sets itself apart from other education providers who may be lacking in such achievements and recognition by a world governing body for “ground breaking research and scholarship” (see Figure 12). Viewed comprehensively, the university research page highlighting past and present Nobel Laureates invokes a sense of historical resonance with a Eurocentric emphasis. However, the future appears to be one that is culturally diverse as the university claims its identity as one that promotes research excellence in a borderless world. This is evident in the international student page where a sister site in Chinese has been created, signalling to future researchers that their linguistic and cultural backgrounds will not impede their potential to be a part of the university’s steady movement towards a progressive future.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, through the application of textual and visual analytical approaches, I have demonstrated how the university website functions as a rich channel of communication for the construction and dissemination of the university’s unique identity. Specifically, I have shown how the university communicates various thematic considerations that are part of its ethos on a selection of webpages on the university website. The pages selected for the analysis represent key content that is relevant to international postgraduate students. As shown in this chapter, the university utilizes powerful discourses and imagery to convey a vision of how it wishes to be perceived by the wider public. In doing so, the university attempts to set itself apart from other universities by claiming its identity as an elite institution which defines its core identity as one that is steeped in research excellence, a rich cultural life, the pursuit of scientific knowledge, top value education, a stunning natural setting, a focus on the Asian market and a strong connection to its
historic past and regal architecture. Having said that, I am also aware that the qualitative research methodology used in this study, like all methodologies, potentially conceals as well as reveals the truth as it is perceived by various groups. Hence, this study presents a possible interpretation of the representation of the institutional and academic identities that pervades one university's promotional media on a selection of pages on its website. As a number of scholars point out, an interpretative approach to the analysis of reality acknowledges that the nature of reality is subjective because it is negotiated and internalized by various groups based on their individual historical and cultural backgrounds (Bunniss and Kelly 2010; Racine and Petrucka 2011). Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings attached to the discourses and images on the university website as they are understood by prospective international postgraduate audience, I analyse student narratives detailing their responses to the university website and their overseas study experience at the university. In the next chapter, I present the key themes identified by a cohort of international postgraduate students who have documented their responses to the university website and details of their actual overseas study experience upon arrival.
Chapter 5: Identities and the overseas study experience: insights from student narratives

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the role of HE promotional media in shaping international postgraduate student expectations of the overseas study experience through an analysis of their written narratives. The merits and use of narrative research to obtain insights on the ways in which people draw meaning from the world around them has been discussed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I proceed with the narrative analysis and present the findings. The data analysis addresses the expectations of international postgraduate students based on their initial contact with the university HE promotional media. I also refer to Jonathan Ivy’s (2008) framework on the 7Ps of the new higher education marketing mix to interpret and categorize the findings. The results of the analysis have led to an adaptation of Ivy’s framework to include the dimensions of prestige, proficiency, premium and the personal as additional components that define the expectations of a cohort of international postgraduate students in relation to the overseas study experience. Through an investigation into their expectations of the overseas study experience, I seek to identify the dimensions that influence the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of international postgraduate students based on ideas conveyed to them in HE promotional media. These insights could potentially add to our understanding of how international postgraduate students construct their identities as research scholars and their perceptions of the university’s institutional identities.

5.1 Research participant background

The written narratives analysed in this chapter were obtained from 14 international postgraduate students. They comprised 6 males and 8 females from a range of disciplines in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Engineering. A wide range of disciplines were sourced in order to obtain
varied viewpoints that offered insights across disciplines. The intention was to be inclusive and to not privilege one discipline over another.

The participant’s identities were anonymised in accordance with qualitative data collection procedures stipulated by the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Adelaide. The participant profile is presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant E</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant G</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant H</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Geography</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant J</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant K</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Creative Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant L</td>
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<td>PhD</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant M</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant N</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Research participant background

5.2 Expectations of the overseas study experience: insights from narrative data

This study is situated within the interpretative research paradigm. According to Snape and Spencer (2003), researchers working within the interpretative research paradigm seek to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences. The premise here is that reality is socially constructed and different groups attach individual meaning to experiences based on the beliefs that they uphold. Hence, the goal of the interpretative researcher is to go beyond a mere description of individual experiences to unpack the meaning behind these experiences. In order to do this, it was vital to use a research method that gave the participants the opportunity to detail
their responses freely. Consistent with the interpretative research tradition, I obtained written narratives from the research participants. The only prompt given to participants was the heading, “Write the story of your journey to Australia as an international postgraduate student from your initial exposure to the university promotional materials to your overseas study experience as a research scholar in an Australian university.” The participants were free to expand on that prompt and write as much or as little as they liked. They wrote their responses by hand at the end of the first focus group session. The rationale for this was to obtain their first impressions with very little opportunity to revise or submit “perfect” responses. Hence, many of the written narratives contained crossed out and rewritten sentences revealing the complexities in constructing reflections on their academic journey. In addition to content, it was equally important to analyse the ways in which the participants structured their narrative accounts. As pointed out by Riessman (2008), one of the aims of narrative data analysis is to unpack the order in which individuals present their life stories. By doing so, researchers can gauge the various meanings that individuals attach to events, their ideas on what is important and the identities that they claim as they try to make sense of their experiences.

During the analysis stage, dominant themes that defined participant expectations of the overseas study experience were mapped out. Then, the corresponding narratives to each dominant theme were grouped together. The narrative data was read several times to ensure that each extract was an accurate depiction and expansion of the dominant theme under which it was categorised. The themes were analysed and discussed within the context of existing theory, research and practice (Miles and Huberman 1994; Richie and Lewis 2003). In particular, I utilized the participatory action research approach where participants are viewed as co-investigators in the study (Racine and Petrucka 2011). Following this approach, it was important to collect data depicting the day to day realities of participants according to their perceptions. Participatory action research is suited to this study because it is closely aligned with postcolonial theory where
the emphasis is on documenting the ways in which minority groups construct their sense of reality in a dominant culture. As powerful entities in society, universities create HE promotional media based on assumptions about the overseas study experience. However, the use of participatory action research to investigate the overseas study experience allows the voices of minority groups to be heard. In this study, the narrative data from participants serve as powerful records of a period in their lives when they made the transition into a different academic culture.

In the following sections, I discuss the key findings related to the dominant themes that emerged from an analysis of participant narratives. As mentioned earlier, the themes were categorized according to various dimensions that impinge upon the expectations of international postgraduate students and were adapted from Jonathan Ivy’s (2008) 7Ps of the new higher education marketing mix. Hence, the findings were discussed according to the following subheadings: prestige, proficiency, people, promotion, premium and the personal.

5.2.1 The prestige dimension

The notion that an overseas education in a Western university leads to better career and life opportunities is one that defines the expectations of some international postgraduate students. In this study, some participants alluded to the prestige of Western education systems as a medium through which they could acquire diverse skills and competencies that would privilege them in their careers. As Participant A, a male Saudi Project Management student points out,

Before I decided to study overseas, I was working in an Engineering company as a sales engineer. However, I spent five years there and found it was hard to develop myself in English and knowledge to be in the management level unless I study abroad.

This is important in that it underscores the prestige and value that Participant A associates with an international education at a Western university.

While the prestige of Western universities is forefront in the expectations of international postgraduate students, it is important to note that access to a Western university is sometimes
hampered by intricate visa requirements meted out to various international student markets by individual Western governments. This process may be easy for some students but others may face challenges, resulting in settling for their second choice destination due to these barriers. This appears to be the case for Participant A, who bemoans the difficulty in securing a visa to study in the United States. As he points out, “Another factor that influenced me to come to Australia that [is] the visa’s process would take short time and easy. While USA’s visa would take months. Anyway …” Here, the discourse marker, “Anyway” hints at the student’s sense of frustration and hopelessness as he would have to pursue his studies at a Western university that may not necessarily share the same level of perceived expertise and stature as an American university.

Following Appadurai’s (1996) ideas on the impact of the global media and the human imagination, we can interpret Participant A’s disappointment as one that is deeply rooted to his impressions of a life that he wants to create based on images that he has been exposed to in the media. In his view, an American university has the power to transform his academic career. However, the realities of visa restrictions due to government policies at the time have limited his access to a future that he perceives to be empowering. We can see that international postgraduate student expectations of the overseas study experience are not only influenced by HE promotional media but also the mainstream media. This mirrors the work of Waters and Brooks (2011) who found that the expectations of a cohort of British students who were traveling to the US for their studies were influenced by popular American TV shows such as the O.C which featured carefree, happy students pursuing their education by the white sandy beaches and tropical sunset. This led to the desire to replicate such experiences when they arrived in the US.

When international postgraduate students see images of their target destination as appealing, those impressions have a lasting effect on their imagination. However, the move from imagination to reality is dependent on external factors such as immigration policies towards particular student markets by individual nations. Since it was easier to obtain an Australian
Student visa, Participant A relinquishes his “American dream” and makes the choice to pursue his international education in Australia. While this is not his ideal destination, Participant A is still happy with his choice because he views his overseas study experience as one that is filled with benefits that can be derived from a potentially prestigious Western university, namely exposure to new ideas and English Language skills development. As he observes, “once I arrived to Australia I lived with a home stay to learn English efficiently and to socialize with Aussie culture to learn attitude as well … In conclusion, coming to Australia was a significant change in my life. And I am lucky to be in Adelaide Uni.”

5.2.2 The proficiency dimension

The drive to claim English Language mastery is another dimension that defines the expectations of some international postgraduate students when making the transition to a Western university. English Language mastery is viewed by a number of international postgraduate students as precursor to the pursuit of an advanced degree at a Western university. Some participants in this study believe that the key difference between English Language courses in a Western university and those in their home country lies in the different methodologies employed in the teaching and learning of various English Language competencies. As Participant A, a male Project Management student from Saudi Arabia points out,

I did 10 weeks English course before starting Uni and I found that their teaching staff was serious about it that encouraged me to study Master. Also the teaching style at English Centre was self-learning which is different from my country where was opposite that.

Here, Participant A highlights the benefits of completing an English Language course in a Western university prior to commencing his postgraduate studies. In his view, the independent learning style in a Western university is perceived to be advantageous as opposed to the methodologies used in his home country because he will gain exposure to what he refers to as “self-learning.” This is significant in that it highlights the skills that international postgraduate students seek in order to perform successfully in a Western university. Although they possess the
skills and knowledge to operate commendably in their home countries, the overseas study experience places demands on their communicative abilities and many are aware that English Language mastery defines their success or failure in their target Western university. In the case of Participant A, success is defined as the ability to master English Language skills in a manner that demonstrates learner autonomy as opposed to a reliance on other individuals within the university environment.

Similar to Participant A, Participant B, a male Saudi student in the same program, also highlights the importance of English Language mastery though his reflections on an English Language preparatory course that he undertook in order to facilitate his further studies. As he reflects,

I arrived to Adelaide late 2009, directly after that I joined what is called PEP class, which is Preparing English Program. During that journey I was really so excited about every things I exposed to such as the way of teaching material and the support during study.

Here, Participant B draws our attention to the sense of satisfaction and relief that some international postgraduate students feel when they are able to participate in a structured English Language program that prepares them for the complexities of advanced study at a Western university. This is important because it highlights the benefits of language skills development programs for international students who genuinely want to engage with a Western education system.

Although Participant B is professionally qualified in his home country, he requires appropriate linguistic support to enable him to participate in academic discourse at an international level. Without this support, he would be marginalized and silenced from key debates and discussions in his field. It is commendable that in this case, the university recognizes this divide and bridges the gap between different academic learning styles and cultures by putting in place a language skills development program that empowers the student. The value of this
strategy is apparent in Participant B’s increased confidence and he expresses his delight as follows: “Nowadays, I am a PhD candidate, enjoying being with experienced guys guiding me through my new journey.” This is striking because it underscores the idea that enjoyment of the overseas student experience is linked to student perceptions on the ease of access to English Language assistance and supervisor support. In the case of Participant B, he believes that he has obtained both these elements from the university, making for a rewarding overseas study experience.

Following Bhabha’s (1990b, p.211) ideas on the “third space”, we can interpret both Participant A and B’s drive for English Language mastery as integral steps in their journey towards a new subject position. It is a position that comprises the blending of their previous experience and expertise from their home country and the new knowledge derived from their overseas study experience. Prior to their arrival in Australia, both of them had clear expectations that English Language mastery would be a vital factor in securing a successful overseas study experience. In addition to obtaining their postgraduate qualifications, they both made it a priority to achieve success in developing English Language skills. Both these elements were seen to be essential in their path towards self-making where the old and new come together, resulting in a hybrid identity.

5.2.3 The people dimension

The narratives celebrating the performance of supervisors and researchers at the university highlight the role that the people dimension plays in drawing international postgraduate students to the university. In the new higher education marketing mix, Jonathan Ivy (2008) stresses the importance of the people dimension in the “network of practices” that impact on communication between students and the university. In Chapter 4, I demonstrated the ways in which the theme of expertise is captured and showcased in the university research page. In this section, through an analysis of student narratives, I demonstrate that academic expertise is a vital element that weighs heavily on the minds of prospective students.
The people dimension encompasses all levels of expertise within the university and is an important area that could potentially persuade or dissuade prospective students from making the shift to the university. The issue under consideration is the level of expert knowledge possessed by potential supervisors. As Participant C, a male Philosophy student from Venezuela notes, the expertise of researchers at particular universities is a key factor in influencing his choice of target university. In his view, it is the academic staff and their research that defines his overseas study experience. As he notes,

I decided to come to Australia after assessing my prospects in other regions of the world. The kind of philosophy I am interested in is highly developed here and some renowned philosophers are currently leading research about the subjects I have been working since I finished my Masters Degree few years ago.

This gives credence to the importance of the people component in Jonathan Ivy’s (2008) 7Ps of marketing higher education where individual academic staff members have the potential to impact student choice and selection of particular universities based on their research profile. Other researchers such as Hyland (2012) point to the increased importance of the people dimension by highlighting the importance of the university’s academic staff homepages. In a world that is increasingly reliant on institutional websites to shape public perceptions, the university’s academic staff homepages play a vital role in influencing the expectations of prospective students through their expert representation of a range of academic expertise.

Participant F, a female Architecture student from Bangladesh also lauds the expertise of the academic staff. As she notes,

I was looking for an appropriate supervisor who can guide me to conduct the research I want as there are not many people in this field. Therefore, I directly entered into the staff page of my discipline to pick a professor (well, I checked their CV) send an email request if she/he is interested in my research topic.

This is telling in that it brings to light the value of academic staff homepages in determining whether students select a particular university for postgraduate study. As Participant F points out, the curriculum vitae embedded in the academic staff homepage is a vital resource for prospective
students to become acquainted with the work of a potential supervisor. Today, at an institutional level, universities cannot afford to dismiss academic staff homepages as a rich resource to reach out to prospective students. As Hyland (2012, p.309) points out, academic staff homepages can meet institutional demands “by offering online resources for students, displaying the credentials of scholars at the university, and functioning to advertise and promote departments.” Thus, it is no longer an option but vital for all academic staff to ensure that their academic staff homepages accurately capture their academic identities. With rapid globalization and greater movement of individuals across borders, the opportunity to showcase one's research and engage with other experts in the field is all the more important. International research collaborations could potentially foster the inclusion of new researchers from emerging economies who may otherwise be sidelined. This idea is confirmed by Participant F who sees her prospective supervisor as someone who has the power to transform her life. By expanding her network and seeking an education at a Western university where experts are gathered, Participant F believes that she could be pushed beyond her current academic status to greater levels of success. As she reflects,

I'd care most about credentials and achievements and research qualities of the school I want to carrying research in. Also, intelligent research peer is also very important from whom I can learn and who can make me to compete and give my best to achieve extraordinary their level and standard.

Here, Participant F refers to a gathering of expert minds in shaping her academic identity and destiny to transform her into an enhanced version of who she is. In her view, by striking out of the confines of her home country, she is able to become a better version of herself. Following Bhabha’s (1994) ideas on hybrid identities, we can interpret Participant F’s reflections on her journey towards self-making as one in which the individual claims a new identity through the process of engagement with new ideas as a result of crossing borders. In the case of Participant F, she perceives her identity as fluid and seeks to incorporate concepts from her host institution in order to become what she refers to as “extraordinary.” The tone of her narrative is one that is life-
affirming, positive and energetic, indicating that the overseas study experience for her is one that is forward reaching.

The role of expertise is featured in the narratives of Participant J, an Education student from the Philippines who praises the expert advice and support that she received from academic staff who smoothed her transition into a new research context. As she observes,

The support of the university (e.g. IBP-R) and other people around me has also been overwhelming. These experiences have opened new doors of opportunities for me and have widened my horizons.

Here, Participant J makes a reference to the “IBP-R”, a bridging program that the University has put in place for international postgraduate students. This program is unique in that it consists of a 12 week structured program addressing a range of issues from writing a literature review, appropriate citation, research document cohesion to managing the supervision relationship. It is a comprehensive program addressing issues that impact on candidature. For an international postgraduate student like Participant J, this program provided guidance and support in an alien environment fraught with uncertainty. Through the instruction that she received, she is able to activate her independent research skills and cope with the challenges around her. To a large extent, programs such as the IBP-R have the potential to positively impact on the overseas study experience by creating a community of practice for students who are forging their research journey in a new academic culture. As she notes, “I have not only gained new insights and knowledge and opened new perspectives, but I have also gained new friends, meet new people with different and rich experiences.” Another student who lauds the value of bridging programs such as the IBP-R is Participant M, a female Psychology student from Singapore. She observes that the “IBP-R and the school’s seminar program really helped to put some structure in an unstructured program.” This is important in that it points to the vague and intangible nature of the PhD. Participant M voices her appreciation of the imposition of order into an otherwise unclear and lengthy academic journey.
The narratives extolling the virtues of bridging programs and school research seminar programs are important for media practitioners working in the HE environment because they highlight the explicit value in tapping into two core areas that are of importance to prospective international postgraduate students, namely meeting their academic needs and meeting their need for community. The implications of this include a concerted effort to signal to prospective international postgraduate students that both expertise and community are embedded in the university’s institutional identity. In this study, I highlighted the ways in which expertise and community were prominently represented on the university research page through an image featuring a dedicated staff member in close discussion with a student (see Page 149). As Participant J notes, the vital combination of academic expertise and a sense of community has the power to transform and enrich the overseas study experience.

While the emphasis on staff expertise is commendable, more could be done to indicate to potential students that there are programs in place such as the IBP-R to assist them in their journey. The value of researcher skills development programs is that they provide guidance without diminishing the wealth of expertise that potential students bring to the university, making it a relationship that is based on empowerment and not lack. This mirrors Bhabha’s (1990b) ideas on the recognition of a variety of cultural perspective as a precursor to allowing fresh ideas to emerge and a new way to operate when cultures are in contact. Hence, in the relationship between universities and international postgraduate students, universities could do well to tap into these elements in their HE promotional media.

5.2.4 The promotion dimension

The university’s exceptional HE promotional media comprising of the website and other print media play a significant role in tapping into the imagination of prospective international postgraduate students. Among the key issues that impact the university’s promotional media campaign is its ability to convey the core business of teaching and research effectively to
prospective students. In this study, one of the themes that emerged from a web analysis of the university homepage was “Research Excellence” (see Page 127). This was evident from a CDA of the university’s homepage where the notion of “Research Excellence” appeared to be celebrated and communicated using a range of textual and visual features.

The value and the appeal of giving prominence to “Research Excellence” on the university homepage can be examined through an analysis of participant narratives. One participant who is delighted by the abundant information related to available courses depicted in the university’s promotional media is Participant D, a male Engineering student from Nigeria. As he observes,

The University of Adelaide promotional materials – The Handbook really gave most valuable information/materials required about the University and the course/programme. The information for programme of intended study were provided with much details and comprehensive enough to make a choice. The University webpage was captivating and I was always happy to explore the site.

Here, Participant D points to both “The Handbook” and the university website as two excellent resources that capture key content relevant to his search for information on his prospective program. Following Jonathan Ivy’s (2008) new higher education marketing mix, the promotion dimension plays a pivotal role in tapping into the imagination of international postgraduate students. In addition to providing relevant information, the webpages encapsulating the promotion dimension also need to be appealing so that prospective students can “explore” the website. The ability to convey core content related to academic considerations such as courses and programs while maintaining visual features that are engaging to prospective students appears to be a key challenge under the promotion dimension. With the increase of diverse media communication platforms on organizational websites, the future of the promotion dimension will need to be one that creatively taps into the human imagination. Otherwise prospective students such as Participant D may move to alternative HE websites that prove to be more “captivating.” Hence, the challenge for universities in meeting international postgraduate student expectations under
the promotion dimension is in providing relevant content and innovative features that set them apart from their competitors.

While Participant D commented on the abundance of vital information related to his course of study, Participant G focussed on the appeal of the university's HE promotional media. According to Participant G, a female Vietnamese Linguistics student, the full range of the university's HE promotional media comprising of the printed prospectus and website were appealing to her sense of aesthetics. As she observes, "I like the pictures in the brochure and the information in the brochure is concise ... I also went to the Uni website. I liked the white background and blue colour on top." Here, Participant G refers to the physical dimensions of the university website, particularly the range of visual and textual content. In her view, the brevity of information in the university prospectus and the choice of colours on the website are attractive. This is interesting in that it points to an authentic challenge faced by prospective students when sifting through a plethora of content. If the content is presented in a manner that captures their attention, then there is a higher chance that they will linger to seek details about the courses they wish to pursue at the university. Hence, the vital element for prospective students is the presentation of relevant information which is displayed in a visually appealing format. From Participant G's happy appraisal of her both her offline and online investigation of the university's promotional materials, it appears that the university has met her expectations.

Following Fairclough’s (1983) ideas on the discursive practices of HE, we can interpret the appeal of the promotion dimension as a key feature in the relationship between prospective students and the university. Based on their narrative accounts, it was found that both Participant D and G were exposed to the promotion dimension of the university's institutional identity when they made their first point of contact with the university through the print and online media. While the content on individual courses and programs satisfied their intellectual needs, the visual dimension personified through colourful images influenced their desire to continue sifting through
the high volume of diverse content. This is significant because it highlights the idea that the
appeal of the promotional dimension lies in the university’s ability to tap into the expectations of
international postgraduate students by fulfilling their needs for both intellectual and aesthetic
content. This two-fold desire on the part of prospective students who explore university
promotional media has led some scholars such as Fairclough (1993) and Ashkehave (2007) to
comment that HE promotional media today goes beyond the mere function of promoting
university courses to absorbing the form and function of other promotional genres such as tourist
brochures. Hence, the appeal of the promotion dimension in HE is now a combination of
showcasing opportunities for study and research as well as providing concrete images of a
memorable experience akin to a holiday destination.

5.2.5 The premium dimension

The notion that an overseas education in a Western university leads to better academic
resources and advanced study approaches is one that defines the expectations of international
postgraduate students. Many international students have firm beliefs that a Western university
offers teaching and learning methodologies that are superior to that of their home country and this
is yet another element that draws them to these universities. This is a powerful demonstration of
how a structure of hierarchical binaries pervades all areas of life, including the realm of higher
education (Said 1975). As Participant H, a male Geography student from Nepal observes,

The university has significant resource for research student. Supervisors promote self-
study and student’s own discovery. They rarely give hand directions like ‘do and don’t do.’
That I liked, and is different than in our country.

Here, Participant H points to the supervision techniques at a Western university which he
perceives to be more independent compared to the practices of his home country, Nepal. In his
view, the Western academic practice of the lone scholar pursuing individual study is far superior
to that of collaborative learning and teaching approaches practiced in an Asian context. The
unspoken message here is that the Asian system of relying on authority figures for guidance and
instruction is seen as somewhat backward. Regardless of whether these ideas come from the media, family or friends, the fact is, some international students view a Western education as a pathway to social mobility, independence and success. This success is personified through independent learning and as this student points out, the “student’s own discovery.” In order to experience this, international students are filled with the overwhelming urge to journey across the ocean to experience a Western university education.

While Participant H pays homage to what he deems top-quality supervision and an abundance of “resource[s]”, he also acknowledges that students are still unable to complete their PhD early. As he reflects,

Sometimes I think if we have that much sophisticated technologies to study/learn and lots of resource within the premise, so why PhD takes 3-4 years? Like in the past without easy access to resources?

This is a striking observation in that it hints at the great divide between learning styles when different cultures come into contact. Even though the supervisor is seen to be practising what the student perceives as expert supervision techniques and the university is fitted with the latest technology, the fact remains that students still lag behind in terms of achieving a timely PhD completion. Participant H’s observations on student performance and the struggles to achieve success echo Spivak’s views on how the academic practices of the West are often structured in a manner to ensure its supremacy and legitimacy as the ideal and as something to be aspired towards (Spivak 1991). If this element of struggle was missing, then there would not be an ideal for the “other” to aim towards. It is this notion of working diligently towards the ideal that keeps students like Participant H in the position of a happy consumer of a Western university education.

From a media practitioner’s perspective, knowledge of Eastern perceptions of education and Western academic excellence provides invaluable insights that could potentially aid in the construction of HE promotional media that feeds into this longing for the ideal. As discussed in Chapter 4, the university website is peppered with images of active students conducting their
research devoid of external authority figures watching intrusively over them. The promise of freedom and independent intellectual endeavours are potent elements that have the power to tap into the East Asian postgraduate student imagination. As a result, countless international students could be persuaded to seek an overseas study experience that they believe would take them closer to their vision of success.

Another satisfied consumer of the overseas study experience is Participant D, a male Engineering student from Nigeria who is happy that the university is well-equipped with the resources that he needs to successfully complete his postgraduate studies. As he states, “The University is highly research minded, and this has been a motivation for me. It has been easy to collect research related materials especially journal articles and textbook.” Participant D perceives an Australian university as well-resourced and successful in its role as an international institution of research excellence. The word “easy” is striking in that it conveys the importance of providing access to knowledge that would otherwise be denied to students from countries that may have limited resources. By bravely venturing from his home country and seeking a new academic environment to pursue his research studies, Participant D is appreciative of all that his host institution has to offer him. His attitude to the overseas study experience could almost be viewed as that of a migrant in a land of opportunity. He is determined to adapt to his new environment and looks toward the future with hope. As he reflects, “With time, I’ve adjusted pretty good. I still [have] more years to study and experience life here and I believe it would be interesting.” Here, Participant D reveals that he is optimistic about the future. To him, the exceptional facilities provided by the university have the power to motivate and drive him to make his academic goals a reality.

From a postcolonial theoretical perspective, the observations of Participant D highlight the very real beliefs and ideas that students have when they assign value to what they deem as new and prestigious. As Participant D indicates, “the Handbook” and “the University” (capitalized
by the student) are symbolic as the ideal in terms of research excellence and resources. Even the way in which the student conveys these resources hint at a God-like reverence for the institution. It is as if the university is a sacred institution and the handbook is its holy scripture. Due to his unwavering beliefs, the student has left his country and is willing to battle harsh conditions and persevere in a foreign environment because he ascribes value to a Western university and all that it has to offer. This is articulated and vocalized very clearly in his narrative. However, the environment he has left behind is silenced in his narrative. This silence is deafening because it highlights student perceptions of their home institutions where the lack of facilities may accord them a somewhat reduced stature as institutions of research excellence. By giving power to overseas Western institutions, home institutions are relegated into the background. As pointed out by Said (1975), the use of a structure of hierarchical binaries, for example new versus old, is a subtle yet powerful strategy permeating all areas of life to legitimate and idolize the new while the old is perceived as somewhat lacking and inferior.

The benefits of studying at a Western university are also acknowledged by Participant N, a male Engineering student from Indonesia. The clear structures and availability of resources are two elements that stand out for him. As Participant N observes,

The system runs effectively because it is supported by the availability of information technology and it behaves as a fair judge. For example, to be in the system, a student must follow the rules, especially avoiding plagiarism. So education system in Australia forms the students to be independent and adult learner. It is apparent that Participant N views the Australian education system as one that could potentially transform him into an autonomous researcher. He values the Western research communication practices that promote ethical research writing guidelines such as the importance of appropriate citation in order to avoid plagiarism. This is interesting in that he describes standard research writing procedures as “rules” that would eventually lead him to becoming an “adult learner.” The hidden implication here is that he perceives himself to be a novice and the
education system in his home country to be basic. This echoes the ideas of Spivak (1991) who states that in a postcolonial world, the former colonies have replaced their mission for territorial gain with economic supremacy. One of the ways in which the former colonies have claimed economic power is by peddling their individual higher education programs as exclusive and equipped with up to date resources. This is achieved by tapping into the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of prospective international students such as Participant N who believe that they can claim their academic identities as independent learners through the overseas study experience at a Western university.

While many students in this study have extolled the virtues of studying in what they deem to be an advanced academic culture, opposing views are also evident. Reflecting on her journey to an Australian university, Participant L, a female Public Health student from Saudi Arabia observes, “When I started my study, I didn’t like that I will be working in the office all the time. I expected that I will work and I will help my department while I’m studying.” Participant L gives voice to her expectations which are based on cultural norms. She presents the cultural differences that rise to the surface when contrasting cultural paradigms come into contact. In Saudi Arabia, she was exposed to notions of conformity and collectivism. However, in the Western academic context, the values that are upheld and celebrated are ones that centre on individualism. This struggle to reconcile the values of their home cultures and that of a new academic culture comes through when international students try to conform to the host institution’s values. As Participant L notes,

I like to interact and network and work with team and share experiences. However, here everyone is working alone. Overall, it is a new system here and it’s different from what I used to. So I think I have to adopt [sic] myself to that.

The modal auxiliary verb “have to” indicates obligation by an external power, in this case the university. The sense of struggle in becoming someone new and claiming an academic identity that upholds individualism is the aim to which Participant L sees herself aspiring towards. The
implicit message here is that the student is somewhat lacking as an individual. In fact, Participant L wonders about this difference in academic cultures when she says,

I am thinking that may be the school here has need to change their PhD program and make it more diverse because sitting in the office all day is not working for me and is not helpful for my study.

Although she senses that the current academic system may not be the ideal, she bows to the system, accepting it as currently adequate for her needs. This leads us to question where these notions of the ideal originate from. International students such as Participant L come from ancient cultures that already have a long history of scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge. However, these cultures are often portrayed negatively in a Western dominated media. As Said (1978, p.287) observes, Middle Eastern cultures are habitually portrayed in the media as a threat personified through the term “jihad”. The effect of such depictions is to create fear in the audience. The unspoken message generated by the media is that these cultures are not acceptable in their original form. Increasingly, these negative portrayals have become so embedded in the psyche of media consumers including the very people whose cultures are negatively portrayed. As a result, they are cowered into submitting to the norms of a powerful media and the agents that perpetuate these ideas. This can be seen in Participant L’s quiet acknowledgement that she must now “adopt” to Western notions of study where she is to be the lone scholar pursuing knowledge amidst the challenges around her. To her, conformity to Western notions of academic study is an indication that she has achieved some measure of success.

5.2.6 The personal dimension

Images depicting diverse scholarly work in HE promotional media plays a powerful role in creating feelings of confidence and acceptance in prospective international postgraduate students. The depiction of a range of disciplinary contexts signals to a wider audience that the university embraces a variety of perspectives and research paradigms, making it the ideal place for
interdisciplinary investigations. The impact of this on a personal level is that it taps into the human imagination by fuelling the drive to be a part of a vibrant, progressive community.

One participant who views the university’s disciplinary diversity as a strength is Participant I, a female Media student from China who states, “The pictures in the front page showcases its strong ability of Science, because most of them are about Science.” Although Participant I is a Humanities student, the university’s focus on the Sciences did not deter her from making the university her destination of choice. In fact, Participant I appreciates the diversity of disciplines and scholarly pursuits engaged by the university. As she points out, “It seems there are many lectures and other scholarly activities from the front page, which makes me feel more confidence to attend the university.” Here, Participant I reveals the importance of discourses and images associated with conveying ideas of scholarship and research to an external audience. As pointed out in Chapter 4, the theme of “Research Excellence” serves as a tacit endorsement of the university’s high level of commitment to scholarship and research. It is this authoritative declaration together with explicit images demonstrating scholarly activities that speaks to the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of prospective international postgraduate students. In this chapter, through an examination of Participant I’s narrative, we can see the impact on the personal dimension where feelings of confidence are built and expectations to gain membership into such an esteemed organization is created.

While paying tribute to the diversity of disciplines featured on the university website, Participant I also acknowledges the human touch personified through the Vice Chancellor’s message on the homepage. This is a striking observation in that it showcases the importance of making the promotion of courses and programs more personal by putting a human face to an otherwise distant and aloof organization. As Participant I states, “human environment should be very nice, even the chancellors show very nice face to welcome me. I believe I could be easily accepted or gain my identity in the university.” This is significant in that it points to the importance
of humanizing the overseas study experience by speaking directly to prospective students through the medium of HE promotional media. On a personal level, the embedding of the Vice Chancellor’s message and photograph on the homepage creates a welcoming aura to prospective international students who feel personally accepted into a new academic environment. In reflection, Participant I points to the Vice Chancellor’s “nice face” which subtly alludes to her ideas on authority figures. In her view, authority figures are powerful, important and potentially far removed from the presence of the masses. However, on the university website, she is delighted to discover that the Vice Chancellor is speaking directly to her, leaving her with a feeling of acceptance which in turn solidifies her academic identity. This is important in that it offers us a glimpse into the feelings of displacement that international students feel when they make the transition into a new university.

Similar to Participant I, Participant K, a female Creative Writing student from Malaysia highlights the impact of the overseas study experience from a personal level by pointing to the sense of fractured identity that accompanies such a journey. As she observes, “Different research cultures, different standards and different expectations made me feel small and I began to doubt my capabilities.” Here, it is apparent that many students have to claim a new academic identity for themselves in an alien landscape when they are in transition from one academic culture into another. Therefore, it is crucial that they feel welcomed into a contrasting academic environment from the first point of contact. Here, the first point of contact is often the university homepage. This is a form of direct communication that cannot be overlooked because the effect on a personal level is indeed powerful. Hence, the discourses and images that are addressed to prospective international students need to be positive and inclusive. This is evident from Participant I’s comments regarding the university homepage. As she observes, “I believe I could easily make a lot of friends there, because people are all very communicative … it makes me look forward to joining in this big family.” Here, Participant I points to the impact of images and
discourses depicting a sense of family, community and open communication as represented in content such as the Vice Chancellor’s message to prospective students. Following Hofstede’s (1984) ideas on the clear demarcation of power structures in Asian societies, we can interpret Participant I’s comments as touching on a core value upheld in her East Asian cultural paradigm where authority figures are seen as heads of households. To this participant, the university community is a family and she views herself as being welcomed into the fold by the Vice Chancellor, the head of the institution, leaving her with a new found identity and a sense of belonging. At a personal level, this meets her expectations of the overseas study experience and places her in a position of joyful anticipation.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, through the use of narrative analysis, I have demonstrated how the dimensions of prestige, proficiency, people, promotion, premium and the personal play a vital role in shaping the expectations of international postgraduate students in relation to the overseas study experience. The findings in this chapter may be viewed as an adaptation to Jonathan Ivy’s (2008) 7Ps of the new higher education mix. In his framework, Ivy identified product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and process as crucial components that impact on the interactions between prospective students and the university, However, the data in this chapter also point to the additional dimensions of prestige, proficiency, premium and the personal as equally important dimensions when prospective students trawl through HE promotional media in search of an international education. These dimensions echo Said’s (1978) view on how the West constructs knowledge through a structure of hierarchical binaries. Here, through a focus on particular information such as the university’s prestigious historical background, premium quality programs and English Language proficiency support, the university taps into the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of international postgraduate students, particularly their notions of the
grandeur of Western educational institutions as impressed upon them through a variety of media. While this strategy adheres to the tenets of a successful promotional media campaign, it also reveals how knowledge is constructed, distributed and reinforced by powerful institutions. Over time, as demonstrated by the participant narratives in this study, these constructions are accepted and normalized.

In this chapter, I have also shown how international postgraduate students form impressions of the overseas study experience based on their initial exposure to HE promotional media. As shown in this chapter, international postgraduate students place a high emphasis on the strong reputation of a Western university. However, challenges such as visa restrictions can hamper their access to what they perceive as their dream university. Other participants in this study flag the importance of achieving a strong command of the English Language as a ticket to better employment opportunities. This is important because it highlights how the embedding of sufficient content about meeting the linguistic demands of prospective international postgraduate students in HE promotional media leaves a powerful imprint in their minds. Here, the implicit message is that disciplinary knowledge alone is insufficient and one would need to achieve English Language communicative competence as well to perform successfully in the Western academic tradition. Hence, a number of participants in this study attach great significance to the premium dimension and perceive superior resources as vital to completing their studies in a Western university. From the results of the analysis presented here, a pattern emerges that a Western university will help students gain access to materials and expertise that are unavailable in their home country. On the personal level, the data revealed that a number of participants appreciated content in the university's HE promotional media where people in authority were seen to be communicating through what appeared to them as individualized welcoming messages. Through this move, the university solidifies its institutional identity as a site of inclusivity, leaving prospective students with a sense of acceptance.
As mentioned in Chapter 3, narrative research offers researchers a glimpse into the way people make sense of the world around them. By collecting people’s stories, researchers have an opportunity to unpack the various themes that dominate their perceptions on a number of issues. In this chapter, these stories allow direct insights into the expectations of international postgraduate students in relation to the overseas study experience based on their first contact with the university’s HE promotional media. These insights are important because they expand on previous ideas related to the expectations of prospective students in making the transition to an overseas university. In the next chapter, I examine the experiences of these students in a new academic environment by unpacking the photographs that they have taken. The findings are then discussed through the lens of postcolonial theory to interpret the wider implications on the identities that international postgraduate students claim and their perceptions of the university’s HE promotional media.
Chapter 6: Identities and the overseas study experience: insights from photovoice

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I document aspects of the overseas study experience as it is experienced and communicated by a cohort of international postgraduate students through a visual analysis of photographs which were obtained through the photovoice approach. The merits and use of photovoice to obtain insights on the ways in which people make sense of their world are discussed in Chapter 3. By applying the visual analytic techniques outlined in Chapter 3, I discuss the experiences of international postgraduate students as depicted in a series of images and reflections on their new lives in a foreign university. The aim of the analysis is to identify the key themes that impact on the experiences of this cohort of international postgraduate students at an Australian university. These insights will add to our understanding of the overseas study experience of international postgraduate students as it is presented through their own lens and will extrapolate for us the ways in which they carve out their identities as international research scholars at an overseas university.

6.1 Experiences of the overseas study experience: insights from photovoice data

As mentioned earlier, photovoice is a research tool that enables researchers who are engaged in participatory action research to tap into the ways in which communities perceive their experiences. In this study, I use photovoice to derive insights into international postgraduate students’ perceptions of the overseas study experience. In particular, I seek to document key themes that emerge from their visual representations of their lives in Adelaide and the associated impressions that they formed as a result of this encounter. The aim is to explore media constructions of the
overseas study experience through the lens of the people whose lives are deeply impacted by the transition from one academic culture into another.

Before they began documenting their overseas study experience through the use of their mobile phone cameras, participants in this study received training on photovoice. The training was vital because it helped them to focus on the aims of their assignment and alerted them to ethical guidelines such as respect for personal boundaries and safety considerations when taking photographs. Since each participant had a mobile phone which was equipped with a camera, no training on the technical aspects of camera use was necessary.

After taking their photographs, the participants emailed their submissions to me prior to the second focus group session. The photographs were catalogued according to each participant's unique identification code. During the focus group session, each participant had an opportunity to explore the meanings that they attached to their photographs. Specifically, they discussed how their photographs reflected aspects of their new lives as international postgraduate students at an overseas university. The ensuing discussion was audio recorded using a digital voice recorder.

The discussion was carried out according to the 5 step inductive questioning process proposed by Streng et al. (2004, p.405). The purpose was to get to the core of the messages depicted in each photograph. Although the participants were guided through the process, many of them tended to elaborate on particular themes that influenced them strongly. As indicated by Bloor et al. (2002), one of key benefits of focus group discussions is that it allows research participants to explore the issues that have influenced their lives. In this study, the focus group session on the unpacking of photographs allowed the participants to reflect deeply on the issues that had a significant impact on their overseas study experience. The end result was an insightful
glimpse into the lives of international postgraduate students as they strived to make sense of their new academic and social realities.

In the next section, I discuss the themes that dominate the rich participant narratives as they interpreted their photographs of the overseas study experience. In my analysis and discussion of the findings, I present transcriptions of the verbatim audio data from the participants during the focus group without making grammatical corrections or removing hesitations. When there is laughter, I have added the word ‘laughs’ in brackets to the transcription of the participant’s speech. As suggested by Lasch et al. (2010), my aim when transcribing the speech data is to present the voices of the participants in their most authentic form and to capture the emotions contained in their speech. Based on the approach taken by Rose (2007), I conduct a visual analysis of the photographs and incorporate this with the data obtained from the focus group discussions. The central themes that emerged in the participant’s depictions of the overseas study experience were: the restorative powers of Nature, mobility in a new city, cultural life, finding an identity, creating a community, coping with loneliness and embracing freedom. Each theme is elaborated in detail with accompanying images and descriptions as vocalized by the participants during the focus group session.

6.1.1 Nature

In addition to academic expertise and the influence of established university brand names, the powerful allure of Nature is one that cannot be disregarded. Previous research into HE promotional media has commented on the role of Nature in university brochures as a strong rhetorical and visual strategy used to attract students to a particular university (Askehave 2007). However, the concept of Nature in HE promotional media not only encapsulates the spectacular vistas that dot the landscape of the university grounds but also takes into account the surrounding areas of the university. These areas include the city in which the university is located, the
countryside and coastal towns nearby. As Gatfield et al. (1999) indicate, when international postgraduate students consider a particular university, it is not only an academic decision but also one that involves lifestyle considerations.

Today, many students place a high degree of importance on technological advances and at the same time, seek out a close connection to the natural landscape as part of the overseas study experience. The connection between Nature and state of the art technology are aptly captured in a photograph taken by Participant A (see Figure 1). Participant A observes that the stunning image of Glenelg beach in Adelaide, juxtaposed with elements of modernity personified through the efficient tram service enticed him to consider Adelaide as a choice destination for his postgraduate studies. His photograph is a stunning reflection of how the conveniences of a modern city can seamlessly blend with the majesty of the natural landscape, allowing its inhabitants unfettered access to various destinations in the city. The comingling of the modern and traditional appeal to Participant A, resulting in a satisfying overseas study experience for him.

Figure 1. “This is Glenelg ... there is a tram there and beach and restaurant ... and you know, everything you can find in one spot ... this place, I’d like to go there ... and I think this picture was brought me here to Adelaide to stay in this city because I think the traditional influences with the
modern technology with the Nature at the same place … it’s really amazing.” (Participant A, Theme – Nature)

The comparison of the old and new by Participant A offers an alternative perspective to Said’s (1978) ideas on the privileging of the new over old through the use of a structure of hierarchical binaries. Here, Participant A from Saudi Arabia embraces both the old and the new, viewing both aspects as compatible and inviting. This is striking in that it reveals how people from non-Western cultural backgrounds have a deep appreciation for the traditional existing side by side with the modern. Participant A’s observations of the harmonious blending of the old and new is in direct contrast to Westerners who leave their home country in search of experiences and settings that uphold the traditional devoid of any nuances of modernity.

Several studies have commented on the inaccurate cultural representations of non-Western destinations in guidebooks ranging from tourist brochures to educational promotional materials (MacCannell 1976; Chang and Holt 1991; Caton and Santos 2009). These studies alert us to the blatant “othering” of non-Western cultures in promotional materials through the use of a range of textual and visual strategies in order to offer their audience the promise of the traditional and authentic, free of the modern and the familiar. The implicit message is that the modern is reserved for destinations that are deemed as “developed” and images of the traditional would be more suited to destinations that are unblemished by the impact of modernization. This is in contrast to the idea of pursuing an education in a state of the art environment. The ideal would be a balanced combination of both the modern and the traditional in an international educational setting, bringing together the best minds and diverse cultures of the world. This idea is brought to life in Participant A’s appreciation of the ways in which the natural environment exists alongside the modern. He is enthralled as he watches the ways in which technology seamlessly transforms the lives of people as symbolized by the gleaming image of the tram service next to the vast ocean in the distance. To him this mix of the new and old points to a rich and rewarding experience. Participant A’s response highlights the importance of infusing aspects of the
traditional and modern in HE promotional media. In doing so, universities could potentially signal to international students that the pursuit of a world class education in a modern technological setting is tempered by the healing influence of the natural environment, satisfying both their needs for academic success and quality of life considerations.

In a similar vein, Participant C who hails from Venezuela also comments on the role of Nature in enriching his overseas study experience. In his photograph (see Figure 2), Participant C draws our attention to the factors that set Australia apart from his country of origin. To him it is the differences in the wildlife and natural landscape that form part of the attraction. He is drawn to the different environment and points to the value of highlighting these characteristics in HE promotional media. In his view, the dual features of the natural beauty and the peace that it instils in those who come into contact with Nature are pivotal in ensuring a rewarding overseas study experience.
Figure 2. “Feeding wallaby ... Nature fascinates me ... an important part of my career is dependent of that passion ... here, we had the opportunity to meet a different environment, quiet, with different flora and fauna ... and beautiful landscapes ... this is definitely something that would be used to promote education in this region of the country ... if you are looking for something different, peaceful and beauty ... I think it’s worthwhile.” (Participant C, Theme – Nature)

While Participants A and C share their philosophy on the link between Nature and their overseas study experience, Participant F offers a tangible example of how she makes a conscious decision on a daily basis to immerse herself amidst the rich greenery that surrounds the university campus. She presents a visual representation of her daily ritual through her photograph (see Figure 3). In her view, the healing power of Nature reminds her that in its pursuit for development, her home city has become a “super concrete jungle.” This is a striking observation of the rapid development of East Asian emerging economies at the expense of environmental preservation. Participant F finds herself making comparisons between what she has left behind and where she stands at the moment. She then arrives at a place of self-acceptance where she embraces the appealing aspects of her host city and is delighted by everything that surrounds her, making it a positive overseas study experiences.
Participant F’s position can be interpreted as one where she actively negotiates her identity and sees her transition into a Western academic environment as one that is both a site for resistance to the old and acceptance of a new position. This identification follows Bhabha’s (1990b) ideas on the third space as a new subject position where individuals have the opportunity to make sense of different perspectives. Here, Participant F notes that her home city is visually...
different from her host city and comes to place of acceptance as she resolves to enjoy her overseas study experience. In her view, the differences between Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Adelaide are part and parcel of making the transition from one academic environment into another. Participant F’s photograph and commentary highlight one of the ways in which international postgraduate students claim new identities as they move between academic and geographical borders. As Bhabha (1990b) and Hall (2003) observe, identities are in a constant state of flux. This is all the more apparent in the case of international postgraduate students like Participant F who are thrust into spaces where they compelled to reconcile a multitude of differences between the familiar and the foreign. Hence, they are propelled to seek new subject positions that would require the amalgamation of new perspectives and long held notions from their country of origin. A failure to make this transition would result in isolation and a dislocation of their identity, resulting in an unfulfilling overseas study experience. Here, Participant F has found a measure of joy through the influence of the natural landscape as she adapts to the different and unfamiliar.

6.1.2 Transportation

The theme of transportation features strongly in a number of photographs taken by the participants of this study. Several photographs depict the daily activity of getting to and from campus. For some participants such as Participant C, D and N, this involves taking public transportation. While both Participant C and D use public transport on a regular basis, their impressions of the journey and associated feelings were in stark contrast.

In his analysis of his daily commute, Participant C, a male Psychology student from Venezuela, reflects on his sense of loss in making the transition into a new academic environment. Specifically, he was drawn to making comparisons to the life he had left behind in Venezuela and the life he now has in Adelaide. Back home, he drove to his university job but now,
he has to grapple with the challenge of what he refers to as “adaptation.” To him, the journey towards “adaptation” is one that is fraught with difficulties as evidenced by the loss of control and freedom personified by a lack of direction in completing simple daily activities such as getting around a new city. He laments the need to ask for assistance, highlighting the loss of independence in a new environment. Interestingly, he describes the act of seeking answers in an unfamiliar place as “the time you need to invest.” Here, Participant C points to the idea of time as a precious commodity in the lives of postgraduate students. Underneath the daily struggles and challenges, there is the implicit indication that time is in short supply as international postgraduate students are in their target universities for a specific duration under the confines of strict financial conditions imposed by scholarship requirements. Hence, Participant C finds the complexities of a key social amenity such as public transportation deeply perplexing. His sense of dissatisfaction serves as a catalyst in making comparisons between his home country and his host city. He bemoans the steep transportation costs in his host city and proudly acknowledges that his oil rich country is “cheaper than every place in the world” (see Figure 4).
Figure 4. “In my country, I used to drive to my work at the university ... getting used to public transport in this city has been an important part of our adaptation ... and a difficult part of our adaptation ... it is not clear enough the way the public transport works ... you need time to get accustomed ... the first few days here were really complicated ... I am now accustomed to use trains and buses here ... I think the difficulty is that you just do not have clear instructions or directions to use public transport ... you need to ask staff about where you are going to ... the time you need to invest in order to find the public transport that's suitable to you ... that's the
difficulty I find … in the second place, public transport here is not always in time and you need to take into account a few minutes or an hour before you use the transport in order to get to places in time, I think … public transport here is expensive … in comparison to my country of origin, I found public transport here in Adelaide very expensive … even with the concession card, I found it expensive … in my country of origin, oil is quite cheap … it’s cheaper than every place in the world and public transport is really, really cheap.” (Participant C, Theme – Transportation)

Participant C’s impressions are striking in that it elucidates how individuals make sense of the unfamiliar by thinking back to that which is comforting and familiar. This appears to be the position of Participant C who deals with the transition from one environment to another by drawing on comforting thoughts of the familiar in an attempt to piece together his fragmented sense of self in an uncertain environment. As he reinvents himself though academic achievement, he remembers the way things are back home and makes comparisons to what he deems to be lacking in his host city.

This position can be interpreted through the lens of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Thoits and Virshup 1997; Benwell and Stokoe 2006) which states that individuals derive their sense of self with reference to their position within various relationships in society, for example their position as a member of a family, social group or nation. Here, Participant C claims his social identity as a citizen of Venezuela when he makes comparisons between his new home and old. He finds himself returning to this position when he encounters situations that are perceived to be different or confusing.

When individuals move from one environment to another, comparisons between the familiar and the unfamiliar are an undeniable consequence of such transitions (Kohonen 2008). By reflecting on their life experiences in their new environment, individuals have the opportunity to examine who they are and what they stand for. As Participant C observes, his host city fails to provide inexpensive public transportation to its citizens while his home country is “cheaper than every place in the world”, hinting at a sense of pride and belonging to a country that meets the
needs of its citizens. Here, Participant C proudly acknowledges the strengths of his home country when faced with less than satisfactory conditions in his host city. Hence, a strong social identity based on national pride is claimed as a result of leaving home and re-assessing the familiar when the new environment fails to live up to expectations.

Similar to Participant C, Participant N, a male Engineering student from Indonesia also laments the high cost of transportation (see Figure 5). However, he adapts very quickly to the situation and shares his solution to a costly problem. He states that he sets out early, parks his car a fair distance from campus and takes the tram. His approach to his current circumstance is acceptance of the conditions that define his overseas study experience. While the situation may not be ideal, he is able to respond proactively to a less than ideal lived experience.

Figure 5. “The condition when I have to use the tram … if I have a class in the morning, I used to drive my car to Peacock Rd and then waiting for a tram in the South Terrace station. Along the Peacock Rd, the parking is free of charge, so I can use the park free until 7:00 PM. The trams is
also free of charge from the city to City South station. Considering that the parking charge in the city is quite expensive." (Participant N, Theme – Transportation)

Participant N's photograph and analysis of the impact of public transportation on his overseas study experience suggests that it is a vital issue for him. In detailing his response, he reveals his resilience and resourcefulness when dealing with difficulties in his new academic environment. Participant N's response is indicative of the “adaptation” that Participant C talks about in his narrative. Throughout the overseas study experience, international postgraduate students are thrust into situations where they are called upon to adapt in order to succeed. This supports existing research which suggests that international students who are more resilient fare better when they embark on postgraduate studies at an overseas university (Wang 2009).

In contrast to Participants C and N, Participant D, a male Engineering student from Nigeria is appreciative of the well-organized public transport in his host city (see Figure 6). He is particularly impressed with the efficiency of service as evidenced by the use of latest technology such as General Packet Radio Service (GPRS), a cellular networking service used by the Adelaide Metro which allows commuters to look up the real-time arrivals of buses and trams using their smart phones.
Figure 6. “Combined with the use of GPRS and time-table, Adelaide has an efficient transport service though with little things still needs to be put in order. However, am really impressed with the transport facilities available.” (Participant N, Theme – Transportation)

Participant D’s photograph and analysis of his experiences illustrate the ease with which some students adapt to their new academic environment. While applauding the use of state of the art technology in delivering quality transportation services, Participant D acknowledges that there are still areas for improvement. However, he describes these deficiencies as “little things” which he is willing to overlook in view of the overall benefits derived from his current experience. Following the work of Murphy-Lejeune (2003, p.113), we can interpret Participant D’s response to his overseas study experience as part of a “maturing process” where an overseas study experience could potentially take an individual beyond his or her immediate challenges to greater self-awareness. As Murphy-Lejeune (2003, p.113) observes, “Rather than a total personality change, this process takes on the shape of a personal expansion, an opening of one’s potential
universe.” Thus, Participant D will return to his home country with an expanded vision of himself and the world around him based on his overseas study experience. This is yet another way in which individuals who walk the tightrope of negotiating two contrasting cultural perspectives make the transition into that hybrid perspective labelled the third space by Bhabha (1990b). Far from being a limitation, the new perspective is one of empowerment, renewal and self-growth.

6.1.3 Cultural life

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which the university claimed its institutional identity through its alignment with the cultural life of the city (see p.131). For example, an annual cultural event called the Adelaide Fringe Festival received prominence and was featured on the university homepage. However, the effects of this strategy on prospective international students were unknown. In this section, I discuss the impact of this strategy by unpacking photographs taken by participants in this study depicting their perspectives on the cultural life of Adelaide.

According to Participant E, a female Business student from China, the co-existence of culture and the arts in a busy metropolitan city could be viewed as a type of “innovation” (see Figure 7). This is revealing in that it speaks of contrasting ideas on the place of a city’s cultural past amidst modernization. Coming from an Asian emerging economy such as China, Participant E’s reflection is testimony to the new reality of these nations as they surge forward to claim the mantle of rapid industrialization. In the midst of increasing development, there has been tension in reconciling the traditional and the modern in Chinese cities (Murphey 2005). This echoes Said’s (1978) ideas on the structure of hierarchical binaries where the underlying message is that the traditional has to make way for the modern as opposed to a harmonious co-existence of the two. Upon arriving in a Western cosmopolitan city, Participant E discovers the harmonious blending of what she terms as “the culture and modern arts”. By taking a photograph that
epitomises this, Participant E has indicated that it is an important part of the overseas study experience to her.

Figure 7. “It is the Fringe Festival … I think that … er … live in the city with such kind of festivals … er … is kind of innovation and to get to know some of the culture and modern arts … I have been to several performances … they are very strange (laughs) … I am doing the topic such like systems thinking and you can link everything together … if I experience a lot of different things, it helps me when I am thinking about the research … I will think about people’s behaviours in such environment … so I try to link these very subtle things together.” (Participant E, Theme – Cultural Life)

While the mixture of the old and new in a modern city comes across as a novelty to Participant E, the West has had a long history of embedding the modern and traditional as part of the city life. As several scholars point out, Western cities have carved out a modern future around the rich heritage of their cultural past (Nysetha and Sognnæsb 2013; Joks, Luitenb et al. 2014).
However, there appears to be a struggle to reconcile the two in Asian cities such as China (Murphey 2005). One of the ways in which some Asian cities have embraced both the old and the new in their rapidly developing cities is by forging a postcolonial identity through the blending of their diverse architectural heritage with their push towards modernization. For example, in Singapore the government has bridged the gap between embracing the new and preserving the old by showcasing the old as part of their city’s historical past. As Alsayyad (2013, p.6) points out:

A good example here is Singapore’s massive program to build new public housing to replace its old ethnic neighbourhoods. Responding to the multi-ethnic legacy of the colonial era and attempting to diffuse a potentially explosive cultural issue, the government’s intent was to use new housing to forge a postcolonial identity.

Here, through careful consideration, Singapore city planners have successfully breathed new life into the old by blending the heritage of the past with the promise of the future, resulting in the formation of a postcolonial national identity. As articulated by Bhabha (1990b) in his ideas on hybridity, the city has taken on a hybrid identity, typical of the colonial experience.

Interestingly, there appears to be deep inconsistencies in the West’s attitude towards development in the East. On the one hand, there is admiration for mushrooming skyscrapers and modern technological advances as seen in the lavish praise bestowed upon emerging economies such as China (Peerenboom 2007). On the other hand there are calls to preserve the traditional. This is apparent in Western notions of the authentic East as one that is locked in its ancient historical past (Said 1978). Here, the idea is that an authentic East is one that is free from the impact of change and development (MacCannell 1976; Chang and Holt 1991; Caton and Santos 2009). This mirrors the ideas of Said (1978) who points to Western assertions of the authentic by celebrating the undeveloped as a truly Eastern experience. These ideas have influenced aspects of East-West relationships and come to the surface when cultures are in contact. As a result, expectations are either challenged or confirmed as individuals from both sides try to make sense of their experiences. In the case of Participant E, she is pleasantly surprised to discover that a
modern city can successfully embed authentic cultural experiences as part of city life. She notes that it is even quite possible for a modern city to celebrate the cultural life of its inhabitants through formal cultural events such as the Adelaide Fringe Festival. These different ideas have enlarged her vision and even influenced the direction of her research. As she observes,

“… if I experience a lot of different things, it helps me when I am thinking about the research … I will think about people’s behaviours in such environment … so I try to link these subtle things together.”

This is important because it alludes that Participant E’s overseas study experience has broadened her views on the place of a city’s cultural life in a modern society. As she mulls over the “different things” that she has witnessed, she has the opportunity to create something new, perhaps a new way of being in a traditional society that is grappling with modernity. It is these cross cultural encounters that Bhabha (1990b) points to in his discussions of the third space when individuals are thrust into new situations that compel them to negotiate differences and claim new, “hybrid” identities for themselves.

Similar to Participant E, Participant N, a male Engineering student from Indonesia also appreciates the cultural life of the city. In his photograph, he captures a snapshot of relaxed city dwellers enjoying the melodic strains of the guitar performed by a street musician (see Figure 8). The image presented by Participant N is a harmonious blending of modern buildings and the age old practice of communities gathering to celebrate the artistic endeavours of their people. Participant N labels the caption under his photograph as “After campus, an entertainment in Rundle Mall.” This comment points to the importance of having a social and cultural life beyond the demands of academic pursuits. After a long day on campus, it is important for international postgraduate students to have an opportunity to immerse themselves in the soothing elements of city life personified by the arts. This is a facet of the overseas study experience that has been recognized as important by the university as evidenced by the embedding of the city’s cultural life.
in colourful features on the home page of the university website. Here, Participant N confirms the value of this strategy by presenting an image of the city’s cultural life as a vital part of his overseas study experience.

![Image of Rundle Mall](image.png)

Figure 8. “An entertainment in Rundle Mall, a person who playing guitar has had many event in Adelaide … this is one of the entertainments after off campus that I saw in the Rundle Mall.” (Participant N, Theme – Cultural Life).

Participant N’s photograph is significant in that it mirrors the ideas of Walter Benjamin in his Arcades project where he espouses the concept of urban spaces as places for human participation (Gilloch 1997). Others such as Umberto Eco also touch on this connection when he comments on the fluidity between works of art and their interpretation by the general public (Eco 1989). Here, in an open space, the city dwellers of Adelaide are free to savour the creative efforts of a wide range of artists, resulting in a rich cultural experience. Hence, Participant N’s
photograph appears to be a subtle confirmation of how the modern and the traditional can co-exist without reducing the value of either. This offers the possibility of a rewarding overseas study experience for international postgraduate students where they can take a moment away from their research to enjoy the cultural life of their host city.

6.1.4 Identity

A number of photos submitted by participants in this study reveal strong references to the theme of identity. These photographs and the accompanying narrative signify the ways in which the participants have carved out a sense of belonging in a new environment while negotiating change. It is through a documentation of these subtle changes that insights into the identities claimed by the participants can be revealed.

One photograph that best captures the shifting identity of an international postgraduate student is a submission entitled “The bridge, the transition” submitted by Participant F, a female Architecture student from Bangladesh (see Figure 9). In her striking photograph, Participant F describes the fluidity of her identity as one that is couched in “transitional feelings.” Here, Participant F exemplifies the ideas of Brah (2001) and Hall (2003) who view identities as fluid due to a process of negotiation and change when individuals cross borders.
In her photograph, Participant F captures an image of a bridge which she believes symbolizes her burgeoning identity as a researcher. She draws parallels between the bridge that she crosses on her daily journey to campus and her new life. In her view, the bridge serves as a link between her “two lives” as an international student and as a researcher at a renowned university.
university. She describes her journey as one that is enjoyable, hinting at the importance of focusing on the experience in itself as opposed to the final destination. In her journey, she revels in the life around her. This is aptly communicated through her joyous observation of human activity on the bridge amidst the natural beauty characterized by a colourful mix of birds and abundant greenery.

While Participant F views her identity as one that is evolving in tandem with her new reality as both a student and a researcher at a renowned international university, other participants find themselves reflecting on their physical space and sense of belonging. According to Participant K, a female Creative Writing student from Malaysia, her work space at the university was given to her on the condition that she utilize it productively (see Figure 10). Otherwise, the space would be revoked or she would have to share it with another student. The danger of losing a clearly marked physical space in a new academic environment propels Participant K to make the strong declaration that she would claim her work space by coming into the office every day. As she says, “… this is my way of establishing that’s my space.” Here, there is a powerful and concerted effort by Participant K to claim her identity as a valued member of the university community. By coming into the office every day, she sends a strong message to those around her that she does indeed exist and is worthy of her physical space in the office. It is an act of will on the part of Participant K to assert her rightful place in a new and unfamiliar environment. We know that this is a courageous act because Participant K later reveals that her space is one in which she needs to feel safe and she has achieved this feeling of security because her supervisor’s office is on another floor. Therefore, she has the opportunity to work freely and creatively away from the intrusive eyes of her supervisor. This is significant in that it points to a key requirement of postgraduate study whereby a student needs sufficient space and privacy to reflect on their ideas in order to make a valuable contribution to their discipline. As Participant K reveals, two vital ingredients in achieving this is a clearly demarcated study area and the feeling
of security where one is able to critically reflect on one’s research away from authority figures as personified by the presence of the supervisor.

Figure 10. “This is my work space … this space has made me into a more disciplined person because my postgraduate coordinator told me if I don’t use my space, then they’ll give it up or I’ll have to share … so this is my way of establishing that’s my space … so I do come nearly every day to do work and from morning until the evening and I think the other people in the office have been very nice to me … I’m the only international student in my department … so there have been some questions about why I wear the hijab … you know, why am I fasting … but overall, it has been a really good experience … we have a great rapport with one another … and another thing is that my supervisor doesn’t come in because it’s a different floor … I feel kind of safe.” (Participant K, Theme – Identity)

Participant K’s reflections are insightful because they point to a vital aspect of an international postgraduate student’s journey towards self-making, which is the struggle for belonging and acceptance in a new environment. She achieves this by claiming her physical space to carry out her work as a researcher. However, there is also a need to maintain one’s
distinct identity. As Participant K states, there were many queries by those around her in relation to her reasons for wearing the Muslim headscarf known as the *hijab* and her practice of fasting. This provided her with an opportunity to share her cultural practices with her new colleagues. Here, Participant K’s actions illustrate Bhabha’s (1990) ideas on how cultural difference is a positive position from which an individual has the potential for self-expression without losing their distinct identity. Following Bhabha’s (1990) ideas on cultural difference, we can interpret Participant K’s actions as a demonstration of how cultural difference serves as a platform for the sharing and celebration of unique perspectives. Through her encounter with students from different cultural backgrounds in her department, Participant K claims and communicates her identity as a female international student from a non-Western background. She builds a relationship with others based on an acceptance for individual cultural differences and open communication. As articulated by Bhabha (1994, p.34), cultural difference is the confident proclamation of culture as “knowledgeable, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification.” Here, Participant K displays that she is a knowledgeable representative of her culture and an integral part of the international university community.

### 6.1.5 Community

One of the key challenges in the overseas study experience is the loss of community faced by international postgraduate students when they make the transition to a new academic environment. Not only do they have to cope with the demands of their studies, but they also have to carve out a sense of belonging in a place that is far from their country of origin. For some, there is also the pressure of communicating in a language other than their first language. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the theme of community is featured in a number of photographs taken by the participants in this study. The photographs are revealing because they give meaning to the various interpretations of community as perceived and defined by a group of international postgraduate students from a range of countries. Each photograph is a unique commentary on
the meaning of community in a foreign land. While some of the photographs portray community as part of academic groups in the university, others capture the link between physical spaces, food and community.

In a photograph taken by Participant G, a female Linguistics student from Vietnam, a sense of community is linked to participation in academic groups such as a thesis writing group. She presents this idea through a photograph depicting a university web page on a thesis writing group (see Figure 11). As she observes,

I don’t mean that I make friends only in the thesis writing group (laughs) but I mean aside from meeting with supervisors … we don’t have any course … we don’t do any courses here … so I don’t have any contact outside the uni.

Here, Participant G points to a crucial difference between the overseas postgraduate and undergraduate study experience. As an international postgraduate student pursuing a research degree, Participant G does not have any courses to attend. Therefore, her time is entirely her own. As a full time student in a foreign country, Participant G concedes that she will not have anyone to speak to all day if her “office roommate” decides to work away from the office. Hence, she has taken it upon herself to find her community through participation in a thesis writing group. By doing so, she is able to be a part of a community of individuals who are united in their pursuit of knowledge in an unfamiliar environment.
Figure 11. “This is ... I think one of the factors that helped me to get more friends especially friends in the thesis writing group became ... erm ... supervisors can’t ... I mean I don’t have much ... usually supervisors just meet fortnightly and then ... I don’t mean that I make friends only in the thesis writing group (laughs) but I mean aside from meeting with supervisors ... we don’t have any course ... we don’t do any courses here ... so I don’t have any contact outside the uni ... so someday I go to my office and then if it happened that my office roommate doesn’t come that day then I spend the whole day talking to no one ... just go to the uni and go back to my home and then sleep and so ... I think friends are really really important especially friends in the thesis writing group for PhD students.” (Participant G, Theme – Community)

The visual and narrative rhetoric in Participant G’s reflections are important because they point to the importance of collectivism over individualism for people from particular cultural backgrounds. This mirrors the work of Hofstede (1984) who draws our attention to a key difference between the East and West in relation to ideas on individualism and collectivism. While individualism is celebrated and encouraged in the West, the East has had a long tradition of promoting community engagement over individual endeavours (Hofstede 1984). Participant G’s narrative echoes her longing and cultural beliefs to be a part of community who share her struggles and aspirations. Eventually, she finds this sense of community and belonging in a
university thesis writing group. Following Jonathan Ivy’s (2008) 7Ps of higher education, Participant G’s comments highlight the importance of the people dimension where subject expertise in the form of excellent academic staff alone is not enough to deliver an outstanding student experience. Instead, a sustained effort to build opportunities for student engagement with staff and fellow students provides a much needed sense of community for international students, particularly those from community-centred cultural backgrounds.

Besides academic and social groups, public spaces also serve as sites for community building and are featured in a number of photographs taken by participants in this study. These photographs reveal that participants view public spaces in the city as warm and inviting entities where community links can be built and preserved. These spaces are part of the city’s infrastructure and provide opportunities for international postgraduate students to reach out to the local community. This is evident in a photograph taken by Participant K, a female Creative Writing student from Malaysia who views community as crucial to facilitating stability in a foreign environment. She achieves this sense of order and belonging by immersing herself in the community life of the city’s Chinatown area (see Figure 12). As she observes, “I love Chinatown because being in a very different environment ... you want to establish some stability.”
Participant K’s narrative underscores one of the challenges faced by an international postgraduate student which is the need to maintain stability amidst uncertainty. In a new environment, individuals tend to look for a point of reference that resounds with them. For Participant K, her point of reference is Chinatown. As she notes, “there’s something about Chinatown that resonates with me … and I found Chinatown to be a safe place.” Here, Participant
Participant K uncloaks the link between community as a site for stability and security. Here, it appears that the notion of establishing security amidst an unfamiliar environment is one that defines the perceptions and experiences of international postgraduate students. Both the visual and verbal rhetoric of Participant K’s narrative present a powerful commentary on the role of the familiar in restoring feelings of stability and security in negotiating a space amidst foreign elements. Following Spivak’s (1988) ideas on the knowledge possessed by the subaltern scholar, Participant K voices the unique perspectives of individuals from a non-Western cultural background. Her observations offer a glimpse into the role of community in creating a sense of belonging in society. For the subaltern scholar, a sense of community creates stability which leads to peace. In a sense, Participant K’s narrative is almost spiritual in nature as she speaks of the peace she achieves while she immerses herself in the vibrant community life of Chinatown. In her reflections on achieving stability through an immersion into the community life of Chinatown, she notes, “… when I hear people talking Mandarin, I think it’s really peaceful.” This is important because it highlights the universal nature of community spirit regardless of one’s cultural background. Although Participant K (see Figure 10), wears the hijab and does not share the same culture as the predominantly Chinese speaking people around her, she still feels a connection to the community. This could possibly be due to the similarity of this environment to the multicultural atmosphere of her home country, Malaysia. Hence, it is this familiarity that leads Participant K to a place of peace.

The visual rhetoric of Participant K’s photograph is also significant because it points to her notions of stability. The image presented is one of a towering architectural wonder featuring a Chinese styled arch at the entrance to Chinatown. The arch appears tall and imposing, reminiscent of the entrance to ancient Chinese temples and monasteries. The overall effect of this style of architecture is that it denotes strength and power. The majesty of the arch reinforces Participant K’s sense of security in a new city. In contrast to other students in her department,
Participant K feels safe in Chinatown and is quick to point out that those around her have misguided notions relating to dangers associated with the area. Unlike her friends, Participant K feels very much at home in Chinatown.

In addition to academic groups and public spaces as sites for community building, food appears to be a key factor in sharing communal bonds. The idea of people gathering around a table to share a meal and have conversations about their immediate realities is one that is common across cultures. The implication is that food promotes communication and brings people from diverse backgrounds together in a non-threatening environment. The connection between food and community is aptly depicted in a photograph taken by Participant M, a female Psychology student from Singapore (see Figure 13). In this photograph, she presents a collage of cakes that have been shared by colleagues in her department on a regular basis. Known as “Thursday cake sessions”, this social gathering serves as a focal point for students in her department to discuss topics ranging from their research to personal issues. The overall effect of this effort is that it serves as a proxy for the community that she has left behind in her home country. This is particularly important because Participant M is the sole international postgraduate student in her department. By engaging with her colleagues through the “Thursday cake sessions”, she has broken down the barriers that come from preconceived notions about individuals who do not share the same cultural background. As she observes, “I am actually the only international student currently within my batch. So, I do feel a bit weird sometimes but they are really friendly once you try talking to them.”

Participant M’s observations highlight the lack of engagement that is sometimes prevalent when international and domestic students do not mix. She notes that this practice of keeping to one’s own social and cultural group is common among undergraduates because several of her colleagues were in the undergraduate program with her but she never spoke to them. The implication here is that the journey towards building a sense of community is one that
involves effort as evidenced by the verb “try” in Participant M’s narrative. She views community engagement and the development of friendships as one that involves proactive involvement. Otherwise, there is the tendency to have limited perspectives of individuals who are from different backgrounds. This comes through in the reference to her colleagues as “them” which creates an invisible boundary between international and domestic students.

Figure 13. “For me, I am in the School of Psychology and we have something called Thursday cake sessions whereby we actually have a roster for my batch of PhD students, everyone who entered in February and we will just either make something or buy something and we will just sit around on Thursday to talk about anything from our research to our daily life. It helps a lot like knowing more people because most of them … and I am actually the only international student currently within my batch. So, I do feel a bit weird sometimes but they are really friendly once you try talking to them. I did my honours here so I know some of them but I had never spoken to them
last year and this year, this really gives me an opportunity to really interact with them and it's very nice. So, my school friends are really supportive of me. They actually talk to me like ... some people have mentioned before ... because we are international students we are bringing a different perspective compared to the rest and they helped me in getting over the fears that I had initially.” (Participant M, Theme – Community).

Following the work of Spivak (1985), we can interpret Participant M’s narrative as giving voice to the discursive strategy of “othering” whereby certain groups of people are categorized and dismissed as different from the majority. This is evident when Participant M conveys her perspective as the lone international student in a sea of domestic students where she feels “weird” among the majority domestic students in her department. However, she crosses the divide by making an effort to engage and build a sense of community with her domestic peers through a universal social practice which is the sharing of food. According to Participant M, the cross cultural encounter has been a positive aspect of her overseas study experience because of the inclusion of a variety of viewpoints and the creation of a safe space for future community engagement. As she reflects, “... because we are international students we are bringing a different perspective compared to the rest and they helped me in getting over the fears I had initially.” Here, the personal pronoun “they” refers to the domestic students who have embraced Participant M as part of a community of peers, breaking the barriers of the “us versus them” boundaries.

6.1.6 Loneliness

Some participants in this study have touched on their feelings of loneliness upon commencing postgraduate study at the university. The photographs taken reveal strong nuances of isolation in their daily routine. The theme of loneliness in the overseas postgraduate study experience relates closely to feelings of alienation in a new environment. Loneliness is part of the human experience and is experienced by individuals when they are uprooted from familiar surroundings. According to Rokach and Brock (1998), feelings of loneliness may be mitigated through increased social participation but it is a human condition that cannot entirely be avoided. Hence, the waves of
emotions that define loneliness come to all and the photographs submitted by participants in this study are a testimony to their feelings of loneliness as international postgraduate students in a Western university.

A powerful image that reflects this displacement is one taken by Participant G, a female Linguistics student from Vietnam (see Figure 14). The photograph depicts a neat and tidy desk in a clinical looking office invoking images of a hospital room. The computer screen saver etched with a snapshot of a tropical beach is oddly incongruent with the sterile nature of the desk. In her narrative accompanying the photograph, Participant G laments that the desk was offered to her on a temporary basis but she is still occupying the space after one semester leading her to ponder if her status could be viewed as “permanently temporary.” This observation is striking in that it gives voice to the feelings of displacement that surface when individuals are thrust into a foreign environment and struggle to claim an identity for themselves. The result is one of despair, leading Participant G to admit that she is overwhelmed by a sense of isolation which she describes as “a very big problem.” This is in stark contrast to the images of the busy research scholar on the university research web page (see page 150). Here, the photograph taken by the student is one of alienation and a loss of self in a challenging academic environment. Feelings of nostalgia for a faraway home land are poignantly conveyed through an image of a tropical beach on the computer monitor, indicating some semblance of familiarity amidst a new reality.
Figure 14. “First of all, this is my desk and desktop … when I first enrolled there was no place for me in the postgraduate room … so they put me in this room. It is a room for research fellow but at this time the only research fellow … she has finished her research. So … just me and one other PhD student in the discipline were sitting here … so they said temporary but I have been there for one semester already and still temporary. So, I put the question mark, is it permanently temporary for my whole candidature here? I feel basically isolated because my room is on the floor without much contact with other PhD students and even supervisors because we stay on different floors and it is in a little corner so it is physically isolated from other rooms and other people and I feel very isolated. I just realized that this is a very big problem for me as a research student here.” (Participant G, Theme – Loneliness)

With reference to Spivak’s (1993) ideas on the subaltern scholar, Participant G’s narrative could be viewed as the unclowering of the silent voices of the marginalized. Coming from an East Asian background, Participant G finds herself increasingly isolated in an alien land. The ensuing emotions presented by Participant G in her visual narrative offer a glimpse into the loss of identity that surface as a result of this alienation. This is articulated powerfully in her narrative through the repetition of the word “isolated” which is in contrast to the warm, happy faces of international students on the university international student web page. This juxtaposition leads
us to question whether there is a mismatch between HE promotional media and the overseas study experience particularly in the case of international postgraduate students. As lone scholars in a foreign university, there appears to be a dislocation of international postgraduate students from the wider university community, leaving individuals like Participant G with a strong sense of disconnect from the promise of a rewarding overseas study experience.

Similar to Participant G, Participant J, a female Education student from the Philippines articulates her sense of isolation through a photograph depicting her office space (see Figure 15). The image portrays a cold, empty room devoid of human warmth. There are no photographs or pictures on the wall or on the desk. In keeping with the sterile atmosphere, there are a few papers stacked neatly beside the computer. The only indication of human habitation lies in the image of a bottle of mineral water perched at the edge of the desk. Consistent with the desolate mood, the blinds are drawn, blocking out any glimpse of sunlight, leaving both the inhabitants of the room and visitors with a sense of separation from the life that exists outside the window.

Figure 15. “I really spend most of my time in the office because I feel more comfortable there … erm … most of the time I work alone because my colleague leaves the office earlier … so I stay until … erm … 8 or 9 in the evening. I prefer to stay there because no one will meet me or should I say (laughs) … no one will greet me when I come home because I am all alone here. When I come home, I just go straight to my room and I stay there … read again (laughs) … sometimes I
feel tired already … then I just sleep. I could feel the loneliness when I am at home.” (Participant J, Theme – Loneliness)

While the image is testimony to the bitter reality of an isolated existence, Participant J claims that it is far better than life in her current accommodation. As an international postgraduate student who lives alone, Participant J concedes that the loneliness she feels is even more palpable when she goes back to her empty residence. One of the ways she combats this wave of emotions is by ensuring that she stays in her office till late. In doing so, she only needs to return home to sleep at the end of the day. Participant J’s narrative is a strong commentary on the realities that individuals face when they move to a new environment in pursuit of a better life. In the context of international postgraduate students, they are exposed to HE promotional media promising success and glory prior to leaving their home country. However, their day to day reality can sometimes be less that desirable as evidenced by Participant J’s visual and narrative rhetoric.

Participant J’s insights are important because they point to the individual’s journey towards self-making when cultures are in contact. In a Western university, Participant J is pushed to remake herself into an individual whose identity is an amalgamation of her cultural background and that of the new culture she finds herself in. This echoes Bhabha’s (1990b) ideas on hybrid identities. Here, Participant J finds herself in a new position due to the overseas study experience. She is driven to consider new perspectives and reinvent herself and her responses to the world around her. Instead of caving in despair, she wills herself to manage her feelings of emptiness by devoting her energy to her academic work. According to Participant J, the journey towards this new version of herself is one that is riddled with challenges, particularly feelings of isolation. As she laments, “I am all alone here.” This is telling in that it underscores the predicament faced by all who leave the familiar. Ultimately, it is in this place of isolation that they are forced to consider a new way of being in the world or, as Bhabha observes, they enter into the “third space” (Bhabha 1990b, p.211) which is a site for resistance and reinvention.
While participants G and J have taken photographs depicting images of loneliness stemming from their overseas study experience, others find themselves making comparisons to the life they have left behind. This appears to be the case for Participant H, a male Geography student from Nepal who reflects on his past as a “peer educator’ in a Nepalese university and his current reality as an international postgraduate student at an Australian university. As demonstrated by Participant H, nostalgia for home is a common in individuals who are negotiating life in a new country. According to Butcher (2009) one of the ways in which individuals cope with the displacement that comes from relocating to a new country is to search for some semblance of relief in their cross cultural encounter. In the case of Participant H, his memory of positive experiences as a “peer educator” in his home country brings him comfort as he carves out a new reality for himself in his new environment. He remembers the past as a warm and supportive time where he notes, “students used to surround me.” Now, he is no longer amidst familiar surroundings and is driven to developing strategies to create similar feelings of joy in his new country.

One of the ways in which Participant H copes with his feelings of loneliness is through photography, which he uses to fill the void in his new life as an international postgraduate student. Due to the loneliness, he has grown increasingly close to the natural life around him. While Nature provides a soothing balm to alleviate his feelings of isolation, his camera serves as the instrument through which he captures moments of beauty and joy in an otherwise solitary existence. As he states, “whatever things happen I think I can make some sort of happiness from them … whenever … I didn’t find friends and not easy feeling to do reading, I go back outside and take some photographs and spend a couple of minutes with the birds” (see Figure 16).
Figure 16. “Earlier I used to work as a university teacher ... students used to surround me ... I was not working as lecturer but as a peer educator ... at that time I never feel like I'm alone ... here, everyone is busy ... sometimes difficult to find friends ... maybe Nature is closer to me ... I have a camera every day in my bag with me ... my office is just in front of window ... I used to click raindrops and parrots coming to the trees ... a kind of happy ... whatever things happen I think I can make some sort of happiness from them ... whenever ... I didn't find friends and not easy feeling to do reading, I go back outside and take some photographs and spend a couple of minutes with the birds.” (Participant H, Theme – Loneliness)

Following the work of Bhabha (1990b, p.211) on the “third space”, we can interpret Participant H's response to the alienation he feels in a new academic environment as a site for reinvention. Due to his overseas study experience, he accepts his new, transplanted reality as one where people are too busy to form friendships. This has led him to greater self-awareness where he has had to delve into his own inner resources to create a rich and rewarding life amidst unfamiliarity. Through this process of self-examination, he is led to a closer communion with Nature as a channel through which he is able to create a version of happiness that he seeks. This is significant because Participant H's testimony concurs with the university's emphasis on creating HE promotional media which embeds the majesty of Nature in images and descriptive
text on the university’s international student web page. Hence, even before international postgraduate students arrive at the university, their senses are flooded with images of the restorative powers of Nature while they are busy pursuing their research degrees. This is a strategy that is successful as evidenced in Participant H’s visual and narrative rhetoric on the role of Nature in combating loneliness in an unfamiliar academic environment.

6.1.7 Freedom

One of the features that define the overseas study experience is the huge movement of people from different cultures across borders. By moving to another country to pursue their higher education, individuals gain access to new perspectives and are able to interrogate their own ideas. In a number of photographs taken by participants in this study, reflections on the meaning of freedom are featured strongly. In particular, participants point to the freedom of expression, freedom of knowledge and freedom of mobility. In their view, the overseas study experience has expanded their ideas on these types of freedoms. For some, they have an appreciation for the new freedoms in a Western university. However, others are nostalgic for a home that may be lacking in Western notions of freedom but is familiar and comforting to them.

One such participant who finds himself caught between an appreciation for the freedom of expression in a Western university and a yearning for his home country is Participant B, a male Project Management student from Saudi Arabia. For Participant B, his admiration of the freedom of expression in the West is captured when he stumbles upon a booth extolling the virtues of legalizing marijuana during an expo on the university campus (see Figure 17). This is a defining moment for him because the concept is one that is alien to the culture in which he comes from. There is no point of reference for him to associate in relation to the reality that confronts him. However, the experience has transformed him in that it broadens his views on the world around him. As he observes, he was a different person three years ago. Now, his ideas on what is
deemed as normal has somewhat changed, leaving him with mixed feelings. It has made him “homesick.” Suddenly, even the “messy streets” in his home country have a gentle appeal and a quiet innocence that is alluring.
Figure 17. “That’s really amazing, you know … I’m at a campus speaking with the guys about legalizing marijuana in Australia … seems to me an amazing thing … the things in that picture … I will not experience something like that in my home country in the campus … so that’s a really meaningful picture for me … how freedom here in Australia … can be experienced here … say whatever you want … everything could be happened here in Australia … you know, if you could find someone to fight for … everything is going to happen … it’s possible … personally, it has affected me … I am open minded now for different things … different points of view … anything seems to me normal now … which was not three years ago … I had a culture shock first time I came here … er … everything are different from my country … how people act … how people behave … er … everything here … even the buildings style … I am not the kind of person to get homesick … however, I miss small details from time to time … er … messy streets (laughs) … hot weather.” (Participant B, Theme – Freedom)

Following Said’s (1993) ideas on Western notions of knowledge, Participant B’s visual and narrative rhetoric bring to surface the hierarchical binaries that are often prevalent in social constructions of freedom. The implicit message is that Western notions of freedom are progressive and those of the East are developing or backward. This type of deficit discourse fails to take into consideration the knowledge that is already possessed by individuals from non-Western backgrounds. When confronted with the lengths to which Western freedoms could potentially extend, Participant B is unnerved. Hence, he falls back to the familiar as evidenced by his confession to missing the “small details” in his home country. While these “small details” may not mirror the big freedoms in the West, through his cross cultural encounter with images of freedom that are different from home, Participant B pays homage to the life that he has left behind, legitimizing it as valid and equally important in an era where Western notions of freedom are constructed as markers of progress.

Similar to Participant B, Participant A, a Project Management student who also hails from Saudi Arabia is impressed by the new freedoms in a Western university. In his photograph, depicting a cohort of participants at a leadership training program, he alludes to the freedom of knowledge that is accessible to all in a Western university (see Figure 18). While the training program is tailored for individuals in leadership positions, Participant B seizes the opportunity to expand his knowledge and expertise. He confesses that such programs are scarce in his home country. Hence, he views this as a golden opportunity. The main attraction of the program is the
multicultural cohort which he views as vital to preparing him for future collaboration with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. By participating in the program, he admits that his mental barriers to cross cultural communication have been shattered. Instead, he is now left with an awareness that "it’s not a big deal" to communicate with those who are different from him. In fact, he observes that such preconceived notions are “a gap in our mind” which he has obliterated through the pursuit of knowledge.

Figure 18. "This is a training course … all of them are CEO in companies … and I found Australia is a good opportunity to share knowledge with those experienced people … when I couldn’t find it in my country … I had lack of confidence before I go there … and after I did this course with them, I felt more confident … this course is only for CEO but I enrolled … it was challenging to me … my level of knowledge was not really far from them but they have more experience … in the future, if I want to deal with foreign people, it’s not a big deal … there is a gap in our mind sometimes … it is not existed anymore.” (Participant B, Theme – Freedom)

Participant B’s visual and narrative rhetoric are significant because they point to a key feature of the overseas study experience which is the engagement of different cultures through
the internationalization of higher education. When cultures are in contact, opportunities for debate and discussion are available and knowledge is no longer in possession of dominant groups. Hence, the voices of minority groups can be heard, paving the way for better understanding between individuals. As Said (1978) observes, the East needs to move from the position of passive reception of education to one where they have an opportunity for active engagement in knowledge construction. In his photograph, Participant B offers a powerful commentary on knowledge sharing by individuals from different backgrounds. This is not only a first step in better cross cultural communication but also taps into the global imagination of international postgraduate students who seek a rewarding overseas study experience. This is confirmed by Participant B who states that “I found Australia is a good opportunity to share knowledge.”

Besides freedom of expression and freedom of knowledge, another type of freedom presented in participant photographs is freedom of mobility. This is evident in a photograph taken by Participant F, a female Architecture student from Bangladesh. Her photograph depicts three female international students going out for the night (see Figure 19). The image is shrouded in darkness and the only light visible comes from the beautifully illuminated church in the background. The photograph is a powerful testimony on how Participant F’s new life in a Western university has given her access to new freedoms that would be unimaginable in her home country. As a woman from a traditional East Asian cultural background, her movements are somewhat restricted in her home country. As she reflects on the limiting lifestyle from her past, she happily embraces her new freedom which she labels as “freedom in mobility.” The key driving force behind this new freedom is the fact that she perceives her new country as one that is safe. She admits that she has taken the precaution of going out at night with three other female companions. However, even in a group, she would not be able to step outside at night in her home country. Thus, freedom of mobility is an important aspect of the overseas study experience for Participant F.
Figure 19. “So ... why I put this picture is because in my country this is quite unimaginable that four ladies, at night, at dark, in this cold ... going out and having food (laughs) ... and returning back. So, this is one of the freedom that I cherish here. So I just wanted to share this freedom in mobility. Although some people in my college say ... you don't walk alone at night because there are some incidents earlier but we were in a group ... I never felt ... like you know ... never felt unsecure ... we four were together but even this case is not common in my country ... we are in a group, still you don't do it. So, this is a kind of freedom ... freedom in mobility.” (Participant F, Theme – Freedom)

Following Bhabha’s (1990b, p.211) ideas on the “third space”, we can interpret Participant F's rhetorical strategy as one where individuals come to a new understanding of their present reality through comparison with the past, leading to greater self-awareness. Here, through an evaluation of restrictive social norms that limit the personal freedoms of women in her home country, Participant F comes to a new understanding of herself and her needs in a changing world. A close self-examination of her current aspirations in a new country leaves Participant F longing for new freedoms that she would have otherwise failed to consider. Here, we can see that the “third space” (Bhabha 1990b, p.211) is a new position that transforms Participant F’s ideas of herself and the world she has left behind. Far from being a position of
weakness, it is a position of possibilities where individuals have the opportunity to operate in a dynamic way based on the combination of new ideas and time worn traditional values. The ensuing result is a hybrid identity which is fluid and receptive to new ways of being in a rapidly changing world.

6.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, through the use of visual analytic techniques discussed in Chapter 3, I have unpacked the key themes that define the overseas study experience based on photovoice data obtained from a cohort of international postgraduate students. According to the participants in this study, the dominant themes of Nature, transportation, cultural life, identity, community, loneliness and freedom feature strongly in their lives as international postgraduate students in a Western university. These findings are significant in that they provide an alternative viewpoint to the discourses and images that permeate the university's HE promotional media. Most of the themes that were identified such as transportation identity, community, loneliness and freedom were not discernible in the university's HE promotional media. However, these themes were visible in the photovoice data pointing to the importance of these elements in negotiating the transition into an overseas university.

Through the unpacking of the photovoice data, it is possible to derive insights into the ways in which international postgraduate students make sense of their overseas study experience upon arrival in their destination university. The themes that emerged from the photovoice data reveal that the overseas study experience is one that is coloured by both rewarding and challenging experiences. Through their indomitable spirit, the participants in this study rise to meet the challenges that they encounter. Thus, they negotiate their transition into a Western university with tenacity and resilience, revealing that their desire for success is powerful enough to suppress the moments of occasional struggle and alienation.
The discourses and images from the data analysed in this chapter point to the journey by some participants in this study towards claiming a hybrid identity (Bhabha 1994) for themselves as a result of the overseas study experience. As shown in this chapter, one of the ways in which international postgraduate students defeat feelings of loneliness is through the creation of both academic and social communities within their school. While the university’s HE promotional media features images and discourses celebrating community life on campus, the participant narratives and photographs in this study reveal that the creation of community is one that requires active participation and initiative on the part of international postgraduate students. Through engagement with thesis writing groups, social activities in the school and community groups in their city, the participants were able to replicate a sense of community in an unfamiliar environment resulting in a rich overseas study experience. This is important because it highlights the role of international postgraduate students as active agents of change, capable of reinventing themselves through the overseas study experience.

Photovoice is a novel research tool that allows researchers to tap into the rich impressions formed by particular groups of people in relation to their world. Through a compilation of the images and discourses that permeate the inner worlds of people, researchers have the invaluable opportunity to bring to light the ways in which people negotiate their understanding of their social contexts and the identities that they claim for themselves. This cohort’s highly personal photographs provide a powerful commentary on the challenges and triumphs experienced by international postgraduate students in a new academic environment. This is important in that it presents an alternative, individualized perspective to the plethora of HE promotional media which paints this cohort as passive recipients of a study experience constructed by powerful institutions. Here, through photovoice data, we are privileged to see how the recipients of an overseas study experience perceive their lives in a new environment. In the
next chapter, I present a summary of the findings from the analytical chapters before discussing the possible implications that can be drawn from the analysis.
Chapter 7: Summary and discussion

7.0 Introduction

In this final chapter, I draw together and discuss the findings from the analysis of the university web pages, the participant narratives and the photovoice data. I compare and contrast the findings and provide a critical commentary on how the university perceives its identity and the academic identities of international postgraduate students and how these identities may be viewed through a postcolonial lens. In addition, I discuss how international postgraduate students perceive the overseas study experience. Their narratives and visual data provide alternative viewpoints on the ways in which the overseas experience is constructed and realized by individuals who have made the journey to a new environment.

To sum up, I explore the various dimensions through which the university represents its institutional identity in HE promotional media and the unique role of international postgraduate students as consumers and possible creators of the media when given the opportunity to express themselves through voice and agency. Specifically, I unpack various enduring forms in HE promotional media that create representations of the university as an iconic institution in the eyes of international postgraduate students through maintaining some of the central tenets of the colonial past. I also examine a number of emergent forms in HE promotional media that point to possible changes in the way that the university will communicate with this cohort in the future.

7.1 Summary of analysis

Earlier in this thesis, I investigated media representations of international postgraduate students in a selection of HE promotional media as depicted on the university website of one Australian university. Following the work of Said (1978), I highlighted how the university constructed the pursuit of knowledge in a Western university as pivotal towards the achievement of individual
success. Specifically, I pointed out that knowledge is framed along a structure of hierarchical binaries whereby the pursuit of a Western education is seen as modern while the student’s home institutions are implicitly perceived to be out-dated. This strategy appears to be a powerful one whereby the university taps into the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1993, p.3) of prospective international students who are seeking self-determination and success. In particular, I unpacked the discourses and images utilized by the university to convey its institutional identity, the academic identities of international postgraduate students and the depiction of the overseas study experience. Previous research into the representation of various groups in institutional websites has demonstrated that organizations strive to create content that encourages communication and builds relationships between them and their target audience (Callahan 2005; McAllister-Spooner 2009; Callison and Seltzer 2010). Through my analysis of the international student webpage, I confirmed that the university’s approach to its target audience was similar to any large organization seeking to build connections with its client base. Specifically, my analysis demonstrated that the university represented its core business of teaching and research as a powerful commodity with immense transformative powers to improve the lives of prospective students.

Besides framing knowledge as a prized commodity, the university also constructs itself as the transformer of lives through the use of a number of value justification statements to claim its institutional identity as a research intensive organization. By depicting the diverse research projects carried out at the university on its homepage, the university establishes a sense of urgency to prospective students at their first point of contact with the university. The message is that the university is working tirelessly to solve real world problems. Additionally, through the use of academic staff homepages featuring staff research projects, the university consolidates the fact that the academic community is research active. The overall effect of such a move is to create a feeling of admiration in prospective students. We know this is a successful rhetorical strategy.
because several participants reported visiting the academic staff homepages to source an appropriate supervisor for their postgraduate study. They also shared their ambition to belong to a community of illustrious researchers who are in pursuit of knowledge as depicted on the university website.

While the university’s efforts to link its institutional identity with innovative research can be viewed as a strategic promotional move, the literature shows that the West has had a long tradition of constructing knowledge as a commodity marketed to the East with the promise of development (Said 1978). Some scholars (Devos 2003; Haugh 2008) posit that current media representations of international students and the university bring to surface the unequal power balance between the both parties whereby the university is seen as the active transmitter of knowledge while international students are viewed as the passive recipients of knowledge. However, the findings of this study depicting international students as active seekers of knowledge has led me to question the narrow position accorded to them in the literature. For example, on the university international student page, there are images of international students from a range of countries marching forward with purpose and determination. Their upturned faces are etched with smiles and some of them retain their traditional attire as is the case of a young Muslim woman in her hijab. Another example on the university research page presents a student dressed in her lab coat, ready to devote her energy to work on complex research problems. The overall message constructed by the university on its website is that students who attend the university are a vital part of a vibrant and innovative organization.

A central platform of this thesis is Said’s (1978) argument that knowledge is constructed and managed by the West in a way that privileges Western traditions. Specifically, this is achieved is through the use of a structure of hierarchical binaries where the West is represented as developed and the East is viewed as the deficient ‘other’. The implicit message is that the East is perceived to be lacking and in need of the civilizing influence of the West. Scholars such as
Spivak (1991) echo these ideas by pointing to the change in the West’s policy from military supremacy to economic power through the strategic management and production of knowledge. These ideas were reflected in the university’s HE promotional media where students were served with an array of images and discourses celebrating state-of-the-art facilities, research excellence and distinguished academic staff. Interestingly, the participant narratives mirrored the idea that a Western university education is a precursor to better opportunities. This idea is one that appears to be embedded in the psyche of a number of participants in this study. Even before they had set foot on the university campus, they held strong beliefs that a Western education would open doors for them in their area of expertise. Here, we can see the pervasive nature of discourses and images that celebrate the prestige of a Western university education until it becomes solidified in the beliefs of prospective international students.

In addition to the prestige attributed to a Western education, the findings also revealed that several participants viewed factors such as English Language mastery, staff expertise and innovative teaching methodologies as vital elements that defined their expectations of an overseas education. These findings are important because they reveal that the West’s position as a global leader in HE is deeply entrenched in the beliefs of some individuals from non-Western countries. One of the ways in which the university consolidates these beliefs in the minds of prospective international students is through the use of discourses and images celebrating its long tradition of award winning research. For example, photographs of past Nobel Laureates were featured on the university research page to evoke a sense of past glory and build a connection to current ground breaking research. Recent developments in science and technology are also featured prominently on the university postgraduate student page to underscore the fact that the university is committed to continuing its sustained and unhindered efforts towards achieving greater success in resolving complex real word problems. Hence, the university’s strategic move to feature past success with current developments in its HE promotional media
complements the long held beliefs of prospective international students on the esteemed standing of a Western university in the world. This further reinforces the idea that an international education at a Western university is indeed the pathway to a successful life.

Both Said's and Spivak's ideas on the West's strategy of celebrating Western academic traditions have proven invaluable in this thesis. This is a move that occurs in subtle ways and has managed to infiltrate the beliefs of many in the East. As a number of participants in this study pointed out, a Western education serves as a catalyst to self-reinvention. It is through this process that many achieve what Bhaba (1994) describes as a hybrid identity. However, the hybrid identity is not a position of weakness. Instead, as several individuals in this study have demonstrated, they have utilized their position as consumers of a Western education to enhance their knowledge of the world and build their interactions with communities beyond their home countries.

The focus of my analysis was extended by examining previous research related to media representations of international students in which this cohort had been depicted as lucrative resources to boost the economy (Craig 2010), victims of violent crime (Turtle 2009) and weak recipients of a Western education (Devos 2003). Since these interpretations were based on scholarly observations of a non-dominant social group, I utilized photovoice as a method that would enable this cohort to give voice to their own interpretations of the overseas study experience and their position as international scholars. Participant data revealed that they viewed themselves as active agents in the reinvention of their academic identities. Several photographs taken by participants depicted the multitude of ways in which this cohort created new and productive lives in a foreign university. Following the ideas of Spivak, these photographs were testimony that non-dominant groups such as non-Western scholars in a Western university viewed their identity as fluid and were actively negotiating change in making the transition to a new academic culture. One of the ways in which they confronted change was by actively claiming...
a physical space such as a functional work area in their new environment. To them, this was a crucial part of carving out their academic identity in a Western university. In short, this was an act of self-determination indicating that they were very much a part of their new academic home and, while maintaining their individual culture, they could still be a part of the wider academic culture in a new country.

Besides the representation of international postgraduate students as active agents in shaping their academic identities, I also illustrated how this cohort was able to create a sense of community in a number of ingenious ways. Some participants asserted that they felt safe in the city especially in areas that were culturally familiar to them such as Chinatown where they were more inclined to form community links. Others reported building connections with fellow postgraduate students they met in thesis writing groups and popular eateries frequented by other students. This move to create a sense of belonging in a new country stood in stark contrast to the vilification of this cohort in the mainstream media where the only roles accorded to them were that of the deficient ‘other’ and victims of crime. In this chapter, the findings from photovoice data revealed images and discourses celebrating life in a new country without fear and apprehension. As one participant pointed out, her evenings out with friends were particularly memorable not only because it gave her a sense of community but it also symbolized the freedom to go out at night which was forbidden in her home country. Hence, her act of will to participate fully in the overseas study experience propelled her to a new realization of her identity not only as a research scholar but also as an individual.

In short, through a narrative and visual analysis of photovoice data obtained from international postgraduate students at one Australian university, this thesis revealed that this cohort could be viewed as active agents seeking to transform their lives by embracing the endless opportunities available to them in a Western university. This depiction stood in contrast to popular images of international students in the mainstream media which portrayed them as
passive recipients of a Western education, victims of crime or a lucrative boost to Western economies. Thus, this thesis has offered alternative perspectives to media representations of international postgraduate students though participatory research methods such as narrative accounts and photovoice data. These data sources provided a range of images and discourses that portrayed international postgraduate students as celebrating the richness of an overseas study experience while rising to meet challenges such as loneliness and isolation. The narratives and visual data offer HE media practitioners alternative images and discourses when depicting the myriad of ways in which international postgraduate students build a sense of community and identity in a new academic environment. These images and discourses are testimony to the resilience and ingenuity of an invaluable cohort to the university community. Besides being active researchers, they are also resourceful individuals who are able to walk the tightrope of differing cultures and paradigms. As a result of this journey, they are able to claim hybrid identities as evidenced by narrative data celebrating their personal transformation as a result of the overseas study experience.

7.2 Implications of this study

In this section, I discuss the implications that this study has for further research on the representation of a university’s institutional identity and that of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media. Previous research has stated that a university claims its institutional identity through a series of rhetorical strategies within the dimensions of representation, position and expression (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). Hence the discussion will be structured according to these dimensions and draws on a postcolonial approach to provide a commentary on the role of international postgraduate students as both the consumers and co-creators of the media.

7.2.1 The university’s institutional identity: the dimension of representation

This study has investigated claims that higher education institutions use “quantification discourse” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.118) similar to the promotional genres to represent their institutional
identity in their HE promotional media. Based on a CDA of the HE promotional media examined in this study, there is evidence to support this claim. For example, the university homepage in this study is embedded with empirical data to detail various research related activities taking place within the university community. There is information pertaining to “$1 million funding for food security research” and the gathering of “more than 250 housing experts from around the world” for a conference on housing (see p.128). Here, the emphasis is on concise, quantifiable information that is designed to make a quick impression on the target audience. This rhetorical strategy within the dimension of representation has implications for the ways in which universities are constructed in HE promotional media. While attractive text and images are appealing, hard data presented with less textual information is powerful and could potentially influence prospective students to click on the university’s homepage. Here, a balance between dense textual and strong empirical information is used to construct what the university views as relevant information for the international postgraduate student cohort. Following Said’s (1978) ideas on the ways in which knowledge is constructed and distributed, this communicative move demonstrates how the university utilizes “quantification discourse” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.118) to strategically present content that would capture the attention of its target audience.

Under the dimension of representation, this study also found evidence of the “discourse of education as a product” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.119) on the university homepage. This was achieved by efficiently marketing a research presentation on food security as “EVENT BOOKED OUT.” Here, the university claims its institutional identity as a prestigious research intensive university with a high demand for knowledge as evidenced by a fully booked university research event. This move on the part of the university supports the ideas of scholars such as Said (1978) and Spivak (1991) who point to the power achieved by the West through the commodification of knowledge. By representing knowledge as an attractive commodity, the university conveys the idea of research prestige to its audience. The explicit message is that the
university offers prospective students the opportunity to achieve great academic success through access to its vast resources and expertise. The caption “Want to study and get a degree from one of Australia’s best universities?” is a direct invitation to a life transforming opportunity which cannot be achieved in the student’s home country. Here, the implicit message is that the student’s home institution is somewhat lacking in the resources and expertise required to achieve outstanding academic success.

While the discourses of “quantification” and “education as a product” confirm the ideas of postcolonial theorists such as Said and Spivak on the West’s hegemonic construction of knowledge, this study has also found that some individuals responded positively to these ideas with the aim to expand their academic identities. Far from being a subjugating force in their lives, some individuals in this study voiced their gratitude for a Western education which they viewed as superior in terms of resources and expertise. They celebrated the accessibility to a Western education through an overseas study experience and viewed the process as an integral part in claiming a hybrid identity. Similar to the ideas espoused by Bhaba (1994), these individuals also viewed their hybrid identities as positive and productive. As illustrated by one participant, “The university has significant resource for research student. Supervisors promote self-study and student’s own discovery. They rarely give hand directions like ‘do and don’t do.’ This I liked, and is different than in our country.” In this excerpt, it is evident that any initial reverence for external figures such as “the university” and “supervisors” gradually shifts into a strong assertion of the participant’s own voice where he states “This I liked” underscoring his independent views as a result of his overseas education. Thus, the findings of this study offer a different perspective to the debates on the West’s domination over the East through the control and distribution of knowledge. Here, in the dimension of representation, through the use of the discourses of “quantification” and “education as a product”, the university has successfully captured the
attention of prospective students and facilitated their journey towards a greater vision of themselves and their academic identities.

7.2.2 The university's institutional identity: the dimension position

According to Benwell and Stokoe (2006), a university claims its institutional identity within the dimension of position by creating a strong corporate identity which is aligned to credible external authorities. In this study, the findings revealed that the university achieved this by highlighting its ties to a reputable organization supporting enlightenment and human achievement. For example, on the university research page, past and present Nobel Laureates are featured and celebrated. The implications of strategically constructing an institutional identity linked to the world renowned Nobel Foundation is twofold. Firstly, the university gains strong credibility amidst its peers and prospective students in relation to its position as a world class research intensive university. Secondly, it evokes a strong sense of history that is defined by a long standing tradition of excellence. Here, the overwhelming message is that the university is in the esteemed position of producing outstanding researchers and will continue to do so as evidenced by its illustrious track record.

Another strategy employed by the university to represent its institutional identity within the dimension of position is through the use of academic staff homepages detailing staff research activities comprising of research publications, research funding and current research supervision projects. The effects of this move can be examined through the responses of international postgraduate students currently enrolled at the university. The findings revealed that the university's institutional identity depicting staff research expertise was a key factor in influencing prospective students. By featuring academic staff profiles on the university website, the university establishes credibility and meets the expectations of prospective students in search particular research expertise. As one participant observes, “I was looking for an appropriate supervisor who can guide me to conduct the research I want as there are not many people in this field. Therefore,
I directly entered into the staff page of my discipline to pick a professor.” The implications of representing academic staff expertise in HE promotional media, as indicated above, leads to a strong motivation on the part of prospective students to explore specific promotional material relevant to their needs. Through academic staff pages, the university has an opportunity to meet the expectations of prospective students in search of quality supervision. Thus, it is no longer optional for universities to feature academic staff pages. Instead, staff profiles have become an invaluable part of the university’s institutional identity. Through carefully crafted HE promotional media showcasing talent and expertise which has the potential to capture the imagination of students, the university solidifies its identity within the dimension of position as a leader in the higher education market.

In short, the university claims its institutional identity within the dimension of position by tapping into its rich resource of human talent and showcasing its links to external academic regulatory bodies. Through this strategic move, the university achieves credibility in the eyes of its ever discerning audience. This strategy also supports the views of postcolonial theorists such as Said and Spivak who underscore the power that is embedded within Western knowledge production and distribution. In this study this was particularly evident through the university’s strong alliances to external bodies tasked with the recognition of research excellence and the display of staff research activities on its website.

7.2.3 The university's institutional identity: the dimension of expression

The university represents its institutional identity within the dimension of expression through the use a variety of phrases depicting its appeal and value to its target audience (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). Based on a CDA of the university’s promotional media, the findings in this study provide support for the representation of the university’s core business as a medium through which the audience may obtain great success in their lives. The data revealed that this is achieved through visually featuring renowned individuals who have achieved global success in their areas of
expertise. Interestingly, this was not confined to academic success alone as evidenced by a feature depicting “international musicians of highest standing” on the university homepage. Here, the analytical findings of this study provide support for postcolonial theories on the construction of knowledge as a transformational force in the lives of individuals. As Spivak (1991) notes, with the erosion of Western economic domination, the West has had to renew their focus on the production and distribution of knowledge. In this study, the university achieved this by using powerful images and discourses celebrating success in various fields in order to build an institutional identity aligned with excellence and achievement. This is an important move, as Bhatia (2005) points out, because the aim is to subtly impress the credibility of a product or service in the minds of a target audience. For example, on the international student page, the rhetorical question “Want to study and get a degree from one of Australia’s best universities?” calls out to prospective students. This is similar to captions littered across promotional media found in tourist brochures. Scholars such as Ashkehave (2007) have observed that HE promotional media is increasingly taking on the features and characteristics of the advertising genre. According to Bhatia (2005, p.220), the impact of the advertising genres on the professional and academic genres can be viewed as “the most prominent instrument of colonization.” This is important because he underscores the covert ways in which the promotional genres have infiltrated the domain of academia. Today, universities not only offer academic programs but also have to win the attention and approval of prospective students by demonstrating their credibility. Here, the rhetorical move of demonstrating credibility in HE promotional media echo the ideas of Said (1978) who highlights the subtle ways in which knowledge is constructed and disseminated by dominant groups in society. As illustrated in the example above, the rhetorical question is loaded with meaning hinting at the prestige and quality of education offered by the university.

The findings of this study provide a rich contextual background that illustrates how international postgraduate students are able to draw from notions of excellence in HE promotional
media in order to push forward their aspirations for academic success. This is important because it echoes Bhabha’s (1990b, p.211) ideas on the “third space” where individuals from non-Western backgrounds are able to claim a new and productive space for themselves through the cross cultural encounter. Indeed, this study finds that the university’s strategy of celebrating excellence and demonstrating credibility in its promotional media has been positively received by its target audience comprising of international postgraduate students. This was evident from participant narratives celebrating academic excellence as embedded in the university’s promotional media where one participant notes, “The kind of philosophy that I am interested in is highly developed here and some renowned philosophers are currently leading research about the subjects I have been working since I finished my Masters Degree a few years go.” In this participant’s view, the work of researchers at the university is a key factor in drawing him towards further study at the university. Other participants echo this view by pointing to the outstanding research supervision at the university. Hence, the university’s strategy of embedding discourses and images supporting its focus on research excellence and achievements is one that is vital to attracting prospective students. By doing so, the university demonstrates a proactive approach to meeting the expectations of an ever demanding international postgraduate student market.

7.2.4 Co-creating HE promotional media: traditional themes

In this study, international postgraduate students have been seen to be occupying two subject positions in relation to HE promotional media, namely as consumers of the media and as co-creators of the media. They occupied the role of consumer upon initial contact with materials depicting the 7P’s of HE marketing as detailed by Ivy (2008). Hence, they were inundated with a selection of text and images related to content on “product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and processes” (Ivy 2008, p.289). As the findings reveal, far from being passive recipients of HE promotional media messages, they actively make choices about their
academic aspirations resulting in the decision to either further their education at the university or to seek alternative higher education providers.

In contrast to their role as recipients of HE promotional media, an analysis of the photovoice data reveals that international postgraduate students could also be seen as potential co-creators of the media. The photovoice data offers alternative perspectives on the overseas study experience by showcasing the experiences of international postgraduate students as captured and illustrated by them. This viewpoint deconstructs Said’s (1978) observations of knowledge as produced and legitimized by powerful groups in society. Here, a less dominant group speaks through the power of photovoice, lending their voices to the creation of new knowledge which would otherwise be submerged under a sea of dominant institutional voices that control various media communication platforms in society. The photographs submitted by this cohort depict a range of experiences and provide an intimate snapshot into their academic and personal lives. The images are testimony to the authentic experiences of people who have firsthand knowledge of making the transition from one academic environment to another. As discussed, the findings of the study reveal a number of key themes that define their overseas study experience namely, Nature, transportation, cultural life, identity, community, loneliness and freedom.

In their creation and depiction of a variety of situations that encapsulate the overseas study experience, the participants focus on a number of traditional themes such as Nature and cultural life. I refer to these themes as traditional because they represent the unique and long established features of the target university which sets it apart from other institutions. For example, the natural landscape of Adelaide, where the university is located, is a key factor responsible in capturing the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of prospective students. This was evident in photovoice data submitted by one participant who proclaimed that an image of Adelaide featuring the majestic ocean in Glenelg and the modern convenience of the tram,
gave him sufficient reason to leave his home country and embark on this overseas study experience. Thus, the natural environment becomes a pivotal character in a story about the overseas study experience with enough appeal to win over prospective students who engage with HE promotional media from a particular university. Earlier, I referred to Inger Askehave’s (2007) critical work on the changing interface of HE promotional media due to the rapid commercialization of higher education. Specifically, my understanding of the link between the natural landscape and carefully crafted media messages comes from her study of university prospectuses. In her powerful analysis of the University of Sterling’s promotional media, she notes that the university embeds the “historic setting which Scotland is renowned for worldwide among outdoor enthusiasts to promote itself” (Askehave 2007, p.730). In her article, Askehave draws on the work of John Swales (1990) to argue that HE promotional media conforms to the characteristics of the promotional genres by incorporating a number of rhetorical moves that aim to fulfil its communicative purposes. In the case of HE promotional media, the communicative purpose is to persuade prospective students to come to the university. For Askehave (2007), the natural landscape forms part of the university’s institutional identity and needs to be embedded into its media messages, thereby fulfilling the communicative purpose of reaching out to a student cohort that is spoilt for choice in an increasingly competitive HE market.

The theme of cultural life could also be perceived as a traditional theme encapsulating long held beliefs and practices of the local people in the area in which a particular university is located. For example, in this study, an important event in the cultural life of the city is the Adelaide Fringe Festival. This annual Arts event showcases a range of creative endeavours from celebrated performers across Australia and around the world. It also holds a strong attraction among international students as evidenced by photovoice data. In her photograph representing the Adelaide Fringe Festival, one student presents a clearly demarcated space within the city labelled as “performance space.” It is an arresting image signalling the way in which the city
landscape has been transformed to make way for the creative expression of its people. It is a subtle reminder that amidst the hustle and bustle of city life, there is also the need for rest and rejuvenation personified by the cultural extravaganza that is the Adelaide Fringe Festival. According to this participant, this seamless blending of the city’s cultural life with its modernity could be viewed as a “kind of innovation.” This is significant in that it offers a glimpse into the observations of international students as a result of the cross cultural encounter. Here, subtle differences in the way a city’s cultural life is experienced in two different cultures can be found. Hailing from China, this participant views the embedding of a Western city’s cultural life into the daily activities of its inhabitants as novel and creative. Her observations remind me of Bhabha’s critical insights on how our identities are in a state of constant flux. Through the cross-cultural encounter, this participant gives voice to the effects of a city’s cultural life on an individual’s identity. As a result of this encounter, she feels energized and motivated to face the challenges of postgraduate study in a foreign land.

While the themes of Nature and cultural life in photographs could be perceived as traditional themes celebrating the enduring and even endearing elements within a particular target destination, a number of images in the photovoice data captured new elements that point to emerging ideas associated with the overseas study experience. These images challenge traditional notions of such an experience and highlight the needs of international postgraduate students upon arrival at their target university. This leads us to consider the following question: what messages can be discerned within the images that offer fresh perspectives on the overseas study experience? Key themes among the images include transportation, identity, community, loneliness and freedom. The images and accompanying narratives are significant because they bring to light the private experiences of a minority group in an authentic and revealing fashion. This testimony offers us a rare opportunity to view how international postgraduate students visually represent their overseas study experience. The images and narratives are powerful
because they imbue the overseas study experience with a sense of legitimacy derived from first hand recollections. By transferring the camera into the hands of this group, our knowledge of the overseas study experience is redefined and shaped by those on the ground instead of the powerful forces of the institution.

7.2.5 Co-creating HE promotional media: emerging themes

The photovoice data depicting new or emerging themes of the overseas study experience draws upon a variety of participant experiences. As mentioned, a key concern for a number of participants centred on the idea of mobility or transportation. Images related to transportation were not visible in the HE promotional media analysed, however, the photovoice data featured different modes of transportation accompanied by reflections on how life had changed dramatically for some participants who were used to driving their own cars to work in their home country. The nostalgia and longing for a familiar and convenient lifestyle from the past pointed to the importance of having to adapt to a new environment. One of the challenges in making this adjustment was the steep costs associated with public transportation, evident in the lamentations of some participants.

The theme of identity also features as another new or emerging theme. The data revealed that several participants found themselves in a position where they had to forge a new identity as they grappled with issues of belonging amidst unfamiliar surroundings. Despite the appealing images and sentiments associated with the overseas study experience on the international student page, a number of participants expressed a sense of powerlessness within their new academic environment. For example, one participant bemoaned the struggle to claim her physical space within the illustrious corridors of her school's academic environment. She voiced her concern through a photograph depicting her office space accompanied by a narrative asserting her strong will to claim the area as her own, stating "this is my way of establishing that's
my space." This is a powerful testimony of an individual’s journey towards self-determination that highlights an emerging theme which could be featured in HE promotional media to signal to international postgraduate students that their individual voices are celebrated and valued. Following Bhabha’s (1990) ideas on cultural difference, this is a move that proclaims to prospective students that their unique perspectives are viewed as a productive space.

The photographs submitted also mirror the ideas of Hofstede (1984) who underscores a key difference between East and West on individualism and community. In the East, the shared experiences of a group of people as they confront a particular challenge are deeply valued as opposed to struggling on one’s own. Hence, community links are an essential part of individuals from collective societies. As a result of the dislocation from familiar surroundings, several individuals in this study submitted photographs that underscored their attempts to create various forms of community in their new academic environment. For example, one student represents her efforts to build a sense of community through the university’s thesis writing groups. In her effort to seek out like minded individuals to socialize with, she views thesis writing groups as invaluable. She states that postgraduate students lack the necessary opportunities for external companionship due to the nature of their research. There are no coursework classes to attend and this limits their interactions with other students. Hence, a key element in curbing the lengthy periods of isolation is through participation in the thesis writing groups available at the university. Here, this participant’s photograph and accompanying narrative conveys a sense of the determination by an international postgraduate student to complete her studies while building an important social network with other individuals encountering a similar life experience. In short, her testimony embodies the collective experiences of a group of determined individuals facing both the challenges and triumphs of living away from home. Although a sense of community can be found, others see this as an opportunity to experience freedoms and the type of individuality perhaps not found in their home land.
The theme of freedom could also be categorized as a new or emerging theme in the photovoice data submitted by participants. This is a powerful concept for some individuals who found that they had to grapple with new freedoms while trying to navigate their unfamiliar surroundings. For example, one participant was intrigued by the freedom of expression at a university event where a political party was putting forth the case to legalize marijuana. He conceded that this was rare in his home country and it made him nostalgic for that which was familiar. It also made him question Western notions of progress and modernity. In the end, he admits longing for the “messy streets” of his home country. This is important because it echoes Said’s (1993) ideas on how knowledge is constructed and dominated by the West through a structure of hierarchical binaries. For example, progress is defined through the orderly streets of a Western city as opposed to the hustle and bustle of less developed cities. These notions of progress and modernity have been etched in the minds of individuals such as this participant. However, this concept is duly rejected by him through his overseas study experience which allows him to reflect on his ideas of freedom and come to a greater appreciation of his home country with all its quirks and complexities.

 While freedom of expression emerged as an area of key interest, some participants also flagged freedom of information and freedom of mobility as equally important facets of their overseas study experience. For example, one student appreciated the opportunities he had to hone his leadership skills by participating in a program designed for company CEOs and another female student celebrated the opportunity she had to go out at night with her friends, labelling her experience as “a kind of freedom … freedom of mobility.” This is an important emerging theme that reveals how some international postgraduate students in this study are embracing what they perceive as new freedoms. Here, through their rich narratives and engaging photographs, they communicate the ways in which they have benefitted from the overseas study experience. Through their engagement with the freedom of knowledge and mobility, these two participants
demonstrate new ways of being in the world, further consolidating their hybrid identities (Bhabha 1994).

7.3 Conclusion

The media plays a powerful role in society and this has been further strengthened by the variety of media communication platforms available to convey information to audiences. Several scholars have alerted us to the fact that the West has a history of dominance over the ways in which knowledge is produced and distributed (Said 1978; Bhabha 1984; Spivak 1991; Moore-Gilbert 1997; Ashcroft et al. 2002). Today, organizations have the potential to reach diverse audiences across the globe through sophisticated channels such as the Internet and mobile technologies. Early in the thesis, I noted Callahan’s (2005) observations on the role of an organization’s home page as a “virtual gateway” which allows it to come across favourably to prospective clients. What I take from Callahan’s critical observations is the idea that the proliferation of technology has consolidated the position of powerful institutions in society to potentially influence public perception of minority groups. The situation is all the more pronounced when the element of a cross-cultural encounter is present as is the case between international postgraduate students and Western universities. In Orientalism, Said (1978) urges readers to interrogate commonly held beliefs on the way knowledge is constructed and distributed. He argues that the powerful elite not only create knowledge but also guard their interpretations until their views become the accepted norms of society. He refers to this phenomenon as “mind-forg’d manacles” (Said 1978, p.328), hinting at the pervasive choke-like hold that the dominant have over a largely unsuspecting public. Here, the emphasis is on the all-consuming nature of powerful institutions and the unquestioning acceptance of a silent majority. This leads Said to the view that the development of society can be enhanced through the responsible dissemination of knowledge which he describes as “a fundamental and intellectual obligation” (Said 1978, p.30).
In contrast to Said’s views, current media representations of international students who do not share the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their destination universities often depict this cohort from a position of powerlessness. For example, the media messages concerning this group have varied from portrayals as defenceless victims of crime, deficient academic performers with poor English Language skills to a rich economic resource capable of boosting the economy. These messages which were constructed by the mainstream media have powerful consequences in relation to the ways in which this group is perceived by society. Besides the mainstream media, HE promotional media is a rich resource shaping people’s perceptions of international students and their place as consumers of international education. By analysing the media constructions of international postgraduate students and the institutional identity of the university in a selection of HE promotional media, this analysis paved the way for a critical commentary on the ways in which the university claimed its institutional identity and conveyed the academic identities of international students. I also analysed participant narratives and photovoice data to examine how this cohort responded to the messages in the university’s promotional media and their reflections on the overseas study experience upon arrival at their target university destination. The findings revealed that the university claimed its institutional identity through a series of strategic moves within the dimensions of representation, position and expression. A number of traditional themes associated with the overseas study experience were used in its HE promotional media to build a sense of prestige, achievement and history to win prospective students. From the perspective of international postgraduate students, an important finding of this study is the productive space occupied by this cohort not only as consumers of HE media but also as potential co-creators of the media through an examination of their perspectives of the overseas study experience. I conclude by discussing the ways in which the HE promotional media can be expanded to reflect the concerns of this cohort by examining some of the new or emerging themes that were evident from their photovoice data.
As indicated earlier, the university represents its institutional identity in its promotional media through a celebration of its rich history while embracing recent developments in science and technology. Hence, the overall message to prospective students is mixed, tapping into their ideas of prestige education and outstanding academic success in a modern world. In order to evoke its historical past and current success, a range of discourses and images are used in the university’s promotional media. For example, the findings of this study confirm Benwell and Stokoe’s (2006, p.118) observations on the use of “quantification discourse” in HE promotional media. This was seen in the use of precise phrases with short quantitative data to illustrate and promote university research events to the wider public. The aim was to showcase current research underway, underscoring the relevance of the university in modern times. On the other hand, notions of history and tradition were conjured through the use of vivid photographs depicting past and present Nobel Laureates from the university’s illustrious alumni. The aim was to focus on the rich history and tradition of academic success at the university. Drawing on the expectations of prospective students for prestige education from a renowned university, the overall effect was to reveal a culture of excellence and continued success. This is a powerful strategy because it is has the drive to capture the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of prospective students. As Appadurai (1996) points out, the carefully crafted messages in the media have the momentum to push individuals out of their home environment and travel to their target destinations in their process of self-creation. However, there is a less desirable side to these media representations in HE promotional media as they fail to take into account the value of social connections. This was evident in the photovoice data where some individuals highlighted the isolation they felt when they lost their social networks as a result of the overseas study experience. While they appreciated the prestige associated with studying at the university, they were drawn to building a sense of community in a number of creative ways. The struggle to
balance academic excellence with social connections was seen to be an area of challenge for a number of individuals in this study.

In short, ideologies of power, prestige and excellence dominate HE promotional media to cultivate feelings of grandeur in prospective audiences. These texts are increasingly being constructed according to promotional genres such as tourist brochures, focussed on promoting products or services with a reduced emphasis on the creation of community and belonging. The university’s institutional identity is therefore promoted as one that is steeped in tradition and research excellence, but with a limited focus on building communities to counter the loneliness faced by its prospective international audience. It hides the isolation that confronts international students upon arrival at their target university, where as one participant observes, “… no one will greet me when I come home because I am all alone here.” Hence, the element of human connections, as pointed out by Spivak, appears to be lacking. This oversight underscores the way in which knowledge is produced and distributed by dominant groups by masking some of the concerns and challenges faced by students who now belong to a marginalized group in their ‘new’ society. As feelings of isolation seep in, some individuals who were enchanted with media messages of academic excellence in a foreign land are compelled to deal with the less appealing aspects of the overseas study experience.

In addition to concerns surrounding community, another significant area that surfaced as an emerging theme in the overseas study experience which was less prominent in the university’s promotional media is that of identity. This was evident from the photovoice data where several participants revealed the constructive process of claiming a new identity due to the challenges they faced in a new country. Many submitted photographs depicting how their external environment had the power to transform their internal reflections about themselves and their place in the world. For example, one participant submitted an arresting image of the bridge she crossed on her way to campus. To her, the bridge is symbolic of her dual life as an international
student and a researcher at a prestigious university, where she views her identity as undergoing a process of transformation. This echoes the ideas of Brah (2001) and Hall (2003) who argue that our identities are in a state of flux as we negotiate the changes around us. While this is viewed as a productive space by international postgraduate students such as the participant mentioned above, the HE promotional media in this study offered limited representations of the exciting and productive ways in which international postgraduate students claimed their new academic identities. Representations of international students in the HE promotional media were largely confined to the international student page where this cohort occupied the limited position of the smiling international student pursuing an overseas education. While these images are attractive, an alternative representation might be to embed a powerful testimony on the transformative powers of the overseas study experience on one’s identity. By doing so, prospective students would be able to view how their peers were able to grow from the overseas study and achieve a global perspective on their academic journey. I take this view based on insights derived from Said’s writing on knowledge and the way knowledge is constructed in society and how powerful institutions in society play a pivotal role in shaping our ideas in areas of everyday life. Not only does this impact life in general but also various social and ethnic groups. In this study, I have demonstrated, though an analysis of media representations of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media, how their voices and identities are muted and confined within preconceived notions of their place within the university community. This depiction concurs with Said’s views on the production and distribution of knowledge by those in power, leading to a subtle and tacit acceptance by the silent majority who fail to interrogate the status quo.

The theme of freedom stood out as a new and emerging idea in the photovoice data. Following the ideas of Spivak, the non-dominant voices in this study submitted images celebrating the freedom of expression, knowledge and mobility. Based on their engaging narratives in celebration of these types of freedoms, it was clear that the notion of freedom is one
that was cherished by them. Although the theme of freedom was visible in the photovoice data, it appears muted in the university’s promotional media. While profiles of successful staff are evident, depictions of international postgraduate students leading active lives with unfettered access to the various types of freedoms identified about would be a welcome step in capturing the “global imagination” (Appadurai 1996, p.3) of prospective international students. Thus, although the HE promotional media in this study celebrates internationalization, it is constructed from the university’s perspective which is confined within the boundaries of academic achievement. Hence, international postgraduate students lacked a strong presence in the university’s promotional media and when they were featured, the media constructions related to institutional perceptions of the smiling international student hard at work in the lab or happily wandering about campus with their friends. These portrayals fail to capture the authentic transformations experienced by international postgraduate students when they step into what Bhabha (1990b, p.211) refers to as the “third space.” As indicated in the photovoice data, several individuals stated that the new freedoms embraced through the overseas study experience would not be possible had they not left home. This is an important insight into the experiences of this cohort and serves as a powerful testimony to their evolving academic identities. Their insights add new knowledge to our understanding of the overseas study experience and, as Racine and Petrucka (2011, p.12) observe, allow us to “decolonize research” through the inclusion of minority perspectives.

To sum up, in this study I have presented a number of important findings on the media representations of the university and international postgraduate students in a selection of HE promotional media. While the data was sampled from one university, the focus was on collecting rich data and providing a critical commentary based on insights derived from the literature. If the research methods utilized in this study were applied to a different context, there could potentially be new discoveries that would add to our knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. In
this vein, future research might examine the HE promotional media in universities in the East and the West to explore how they represent their institutional identity and that of their international postgraduate students. This comparative study could inform us of how knowledge is constructed and distributed by higher education providers from different cultures. Another area for future research could consist of a visual ethnographic study using photovoice to compare the visuals and narratives from international postgraduate students in universities in the East and West. A comparative analysis of the data could provide invaluable insights into how prospective students view the media messages they have received in relation to their actual experiences on the ground.

The university’s institutional identity has been strategically conveyed using a number of rhetorical strategies within the dimensions of representation, expression and position. Such strategies replicate earlier forms of power and knowledge control found in the colonial era. In contrast, a cohort of international postgraduate students in this study has revealed the productive ways in which they have responded to the overseas study experience and offer alternative representations that extend their academic identities from the limited subject positions accorded to them in HE promotional media. Their representations offer a counter narrative to the dominant voice within HE promotional media and point to the dual role of international postgraduate students as both the consumers of international education and the productive space they occupy as potential co-creators of the media. These alternative voices could potentially transform traditional notions of the position of international postgraduate students in HE promotional media that is often coloured by messages of unequal power relations to one of dynamism and agency. In a world where the nature of media and communication is changing, these productive representations offer a new reading of the relationship between the university and international postgraduate students and point to a place where both the university and its international postgraduate students occupy active identities that complement each other.
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