**Critical Mass | *Student reflections on critical thinking***

**1**

The final concept that I learned through my time in Global Interdependence is the ability to structure a strong argument. Before taking this class, I had spent a lot of time in math and science classes in which I have never considered questioning the textbook. In Global Interdependence, I learned to critically read books and articles and to look for arguments that lack evidence. Through reading more critically and considering the strengths of other authors, I learned how to structure my own convincing arguments and improve my own papers. For the final essay, I was asked to read *Pretty Modern* and discuss whether or not Edmonds made a convincing argument on the connection between plastic surgery in Brazil and the agency of women. As I read his book, I analyzed the strength of his evidence and questioned how his interpretations aligned with my own. Through careful reading, I decided that his book did not convince me of his argument and I wrote my paper in opposition. I was careful to support my points and to address any possible counterarguments as I wrote the essay. I still have a lot to learn, but the class allowed me to practice my writing abilities and to question the information presented to me.

**2**

An ability to actively and critically interact with a text is a skill I’ve better come to develop over the course of these past four weeks. No longer did I take anything read at face value, rather critiquing and questioning at every turn: where are the voices of the Brazilian men in *Pretty Modern?* Is Biao’s evidence surrounding the IT industry enough to account for an entire shift in Indian marriage culture and dowry practices? Did Peter Redfield give enough airtime to the benefit of MSF’s work in Uganda, or just its shortcomings? Why do Americans have an obsession with the “middle class” yet constantly strive to achieve elite economic status? These questions, among many, many others came to light while interacting with the texts this term. By raising such questions in both small and large group discussion, our conversations were deepened and made more thoughtful and, of course, more complex!

I believe the most difficult paper to write this term was the critical analysis essay, which I chose to complete on Edmond’s text *Pretty Modern.* While I didn’t always agree with the claims he was making, I struggled at first when asked to really dig in and critique Edmonds’ argument. However, once I decided to go back to my notes in the book, scanning for the question marks and areas where I was confused or unconvinced, the essay came together much more smoothly. This process, of written dialogue with the text, was hugely beneficial for my learning style as well. As a visual processor, I learn much better through seeing and writing out my thoughts, so all the underlines, asterisks, and exclamation points served to further my understanding and absorption of the readings.

**3**

The extremely critically framed classroom analysis of *Life in Crisis* and the purpose of aid such as MSF was both enlightening and uncomfortable. The issue of outside involvement was one that many students had strong opinions on, and these conversations were often filled with tension. I agree with the fundamental stance of MSF in which they declare, “all who are currently living deserve attention” (Redfield, 164). I believe in their mission of providing care in time of crisis, of saving civilians from “stupid” deaths that could be easily treated. It was difficult to listen to other students argue that MSF was merely prolonging survival, not necessarily saving life. However, I now realize how important it is for future medical professionals to be involved in these conversations without being defensive: the ability to not only listen to the opinions of those involved in other aspects of the issue, such as administrators, policy makers and patients, but to also take their opinion under consideration and allow it to affect my own actions is crucial. This unit provided another perspective into an issue I already believed I knew enough about, proving that there is always room for personal growth.

**4**

An example critical analysis provided by the professor along with further discussion with him of the way to examine assumptions clarified in my mind the method to be used. I learned that, in order to test the assumptions found in a text, I should first locate what I believe to be an assumption about how the world works, such as in Biao’s writing, which assumes a labor theory of value generation, and then examine the evidence presented by the author to see if the assumption appears to hold true. This procedure allows for a clear determination of whether or not an author’s assumptions are valid, and is the method that I used to examine the assumptions in my selected text, “Private Homes, Distinct Lifestyles”by Li Zhang. I examined two related assumptions made by Zhang and found that, while one appeared plausible with clear evidence to support it, the other, an assumption that physical divisions between class residences would lead to inter-class conflict, had very little in-text evidence, and I concluded that it was not an accurate assumption to make.

The requirement that I examine these assumptions made by authors has caused me to develop a skill that will allow me to better examine the various forms of literature that I encounter in my college career and also has a great deal of applicability when examining the actions that people take. As an example, in the book *Global Body Shopping,* I was severely confused about why Indian IT workers continued to enter an already saturated job market, continuing to oversupply demand. My assumption had been that the motivation to enter IT work was financial, which would not explain their continued entrance. Examining my own assumption about their behavior, I later realized that the primary motive was not economic but rather a way to increase their social status. This made far more sense as IT work would allow them to claim a larger dowry and receive a special recognition in India, which explains the desire to enter even into a highly saturated job market.

**5**

I chose this course for an opportunity to reflect on and contextualize my experience abroad this past semester. Throughout my research abroad, I struggled with solidifying my concept of globalization and how the global network works on multiple levels. This course has grounded the process of globalization for me while introducing new aspects. While I feel as though I have a better understanding of globalization and its effects after this course, I also realize that globalization is a large and complicated concept that is constantly evolving and adapting, happening on multiple levels, and unique to the country in which it is taking place. The course provided a variety of opinions, through articles and peers that allowed for more engaging and interesting discussions and debates. While I learned from both the professor and the course materials, I feel like the most valuable lessons I learned from this course came from my peers. Hearing others’ thought processes, listening to their opinions and examples, and being able to question and confirm ideas helped in my understanding of the topics. This course overall has taught me that globalization is a concept that cannot be addressed from a single viewpoint, that one must acknowledge their own context and take into consideration the context of others in order to understand globalization as a whole.