**Twitter as the Teacher: What the Digital Afterlives of Hollywood's Sports Films Tell Us
That the Motion Pictures Don't**

by

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Abstract

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 drew new attention to the discourse surrounding representation in North America. Western sports leagues have been at the forefront of race conversations during this time, but the dialogue extends to popular sports films as well. Through a critical discourse analysis, this MRP argues that there are several insights to be learned from the digital afterlives of three sports films. This study first outlines examples of how the White saviour trope is enacted in *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009), and how the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope is performed in *Coach Carter* (2005). Next, it explores the digital afterlives of these films today, specifically on Twitter. The findings suggest that each film occupies a significant space in the lives of its viewers. The digital afterlives provide insights into the importance of education in the athlete-student relationship, racism of the past and how much has or has not changed, the formation of the family unit, and the issues that arise from using films as a teaching tool for Black pain. The digital afterlives of these films create space for a discussion about these insights, which is significant during a time of cancel culture as this culture contributes to the demise of critical thinking with its emphasis on turning the cheek to something that does not agree with one's ideologies rather than responsibly and cognitively interacting with contrary views. To help stop this close-minded cycle and foster an understanding for how to critically examine films and other media texts, a media literacy assignment for middle school students accompanies this MRP.

Keywords: Black, athletes, sports films, tropes, stereotypes, representation, race, digital afterlife, Twitter, media literacy, Coach Carter, Glory Road, The Blind Side

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Bro, thanks for being my copy editor without complaint for countless assignments throughout the years. But don't worry – you didn't have to read this one.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this MRP to my late aunt. Our family is incomplete without you. I know you would have been excited to see me finish my masters. I hope you are at peace.

Forever your *shakaroy*.

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Introduction

The discourse surrounding representation has intensified in North American society, particularly in the sports industry. This was sparked by the recent Black Lives Matter global movement ignited by the 2020 murder of George Floyd in the United States (Barrie, 2020). Basketball and football – often labelled as Black dominated sports (Criblez, 2015; Martin, 2015) – have been at the forefront of race conversations with leagues such as the National Basketball Association (NBA), Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), and National Football League (NFL) taking a stance on social justice and making promises of equity, diversity, and inclusion (Staff, 2021). Moreover, sports films as a media text play an important role in the discussions between popular culture, sports, and social justice as they often present racialized depictions of Black dominated sports. With the increasing dependence on online spaces as forums for public and private discourse – intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic – the significance in understanding how individuals decode representation in media texts such as films is ever more critical.

This major research paper (MRP) explores representations of the Black male athlete through a critical discourse analysis of three sports films: *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009). Specifically, this MRP explores the ways in which social media users on Twitter repurpose and redefine racial stereotypes presented in *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009) to ultimately draw on lessons that can be learned from these films beyond their racial tropes. At the core of this research is finding a way to use the knowledge of online audience’s repurposing to teach young people how to be critical thinkers when analyzing and making meaning of racial stereotypes in media texts themselves.

Each film contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes and storytelling tropes of Black male athletes and the Black community, as well as how this group differs from the presentation of White families, coaches, and athletes. These three movies are recognized as award-winning and popular sports films (Schultz, 2014; Descamps & Vivier, 2020; Arntson, 2020) meaning a greater audience has seen and conceptualized these works. Furthermore, each film has been endorsed by the sports communities they serve as providing a lens for viewing the difficulties, emotions, and life of the Black male athlete. Specifically, this paper will inspect the tropes associated with the Black athlete in these films and will investigate how these ubiquitous generalities live well beyond the films' popularity in the box office. These films' conventions have the potential to influence society's understanding of Black male athletes' lives and the potential also to contribute to an incomplete discussion after the film credits end. Indeed, often, the discussion begins only after the end of the films, as the audience digests the social narratives, structures, and ideologies that have been presented to them.

This MRP argues that there are several insights to be learned from the digital afterlives of *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009). These insights include some that draw on the films' racial tropes and others that bring attention to different areas of the film that audiences can learn a lot from. The digital afterlives of these films – meaning the domestication, appropriation, and transformation of these messages on Twitter through videos, images, or text tweets – create space for a broader discussion about these lessons, which is significant during a time of “cancel culture.” At its core, cancel culture extracts any type of support for something that is objectionable or someone who has said or done something problematic, commonly from a social justice standpoint (Ng, 2020). Cancel culture contributes to the demise of critical thinking with its emphasis on turning the cheek to something that does not

agree with one's ideologies rather than responsibly and cognitively interacting with contrary views. In an effort to stop this close-minded cycle and foster an understanding for how to critically examine films and other media texts, a media literacy assignment for middle school students accompanies this MRP.

Key Terms and Definitions

For clarity throughout the paper, it is necessary to outline the definition of key terms utilized in this project. Media texts, broadly speaking, “include news, communication technologies like mobile phones and social networking, popular entertainment, and advertising across platforms (Woodstock, 2016). Films are the media text under examination in this MRP.

When referring to the “digital afterlife” of the films, I employ Soep's (2012) definition. Soep mentions that “the digital age has fundamentally re-configured the relationship between makers and users” (p. 93). The digital afterlife refers to the process of the intended meanings of media makers and its development in recontextualizing those meanings online. Soep argues that this phenomenon has remarkable consequences for youth-made media as content is repurposed repeatedly online.

It is common knowledge that men and women of colour are often forced into roles that depict stereotypes of their demographic (Bucciferro, 2021; Alexander, 2019; Wiegman, 2000). For instance, Black men often play roles that link them to crime, homelessness, and drugs (Bucciferro, 2021). For this, when mentioning racial tropes, I refer to the stereotypical storylines that are often connected to the Black male athlete.

Lastly, social media, at its basic level, is “a collection of websites and applications designed to build and enhance online communities for networking and sharing information” (Osborne-Gowey, 2014, p. 55). In this project I explore the exchange of ideas in each film's

community on the social media platform Twitter. The specifics of this social media platform will be discussed later on.

Overview of Project

This MRP is comprised of six sections. First, a literature review of research relevant to this study. Second, a statement of the research questions at hand. Third, an explanation of the methodology for this project. Fourth, a report of the study's findings. Fifth, a discussion on the findings and the study's relevance, larger context, and areas for future research is considered. Lastly, I conclude this paper with final thoughts on the impact of this project.

This study outlines examples of how the White saviour trope was enacted in both *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009), and how the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope was performed in *Coach Carter* (2005). Mainly, this MRP shows the digital afterlives of the films today; an afterlife that provides insight about what these films offer beyond their racial stereotypes. The results demonstrate that each film occupies a significant space in the lives of its viewers, as expressed by each film's respective Twitter audience. The digital afterlives of the films provide insights into the importance of education in the athlete-student relationship, racism of the past and how much has or has not changed, the formation of the family unit, and the issues that arise from using films as a teaching tool for Black pain. This study also discusses a media literacy assignment created specifically alongside this project. It is meant to serve as a practical example of one approach in encouraging young people to decode tropes that reinforce negative stereotypes about the Black male athlete in Hollywood films, as well as challenge the messages of a media text through recoding via social media. Once the popcorn is finished, the final credit rolls up, and the lights turn back on, the time to measure a film's impact truly begins.

Literature Review

The following section outlines the theoretical and conceptual approaches that will be covered in the MRP and an overview of the current state of research relevant to this project. This MRP is about the way social media allows users – specifically on Twitter – to repurpose and redefine the racial stereotypes presented in *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009); and furthermore, this MRP explores how we can use this understanding to teach young people how to be critical thinkers when analyzing and making meaning of racial stereotypes in media texts, such as films.

Before dissecting how Twitter audiences of these films repurpose and redefine the racial stereotypes within the films, it is necessary to review current knowledge related to this project. To do this, the literature review discusses several factors related to meaning making and semiotics in media texts, Black representation in sports media, tropes in the three films, and Twitter as a domain of focus for research. First, this section explores Stuart Hall's (1980) reception theory in media and communication studies and Roland Barthes' (1974) five codes within his semiotic theory. This understanding is the foundation for the analysis conducted throughout the MRP and is essential for composing the pedagogical element accompanying this paper. Second, the literature review will examine "Blackness" and the ways in which Blackness has been showcased in contemporary sports culture. Third, the literature review takes a close look at two key tropes and illustrates how prominent they are in all three films: the White saviour and the academically poor performing Black student-athlete tropes. Lastly, Twitter as the research forum and its relation to the pedagogical goal of this project is discussed.

Decoding Messages Using Hall's Reception Theory and Barthes Semiotic Theory

Hall was a 'cultural theorist' though his work has not received the level of devoutness as the likes of other scholars of cultural studies, such as Michel Foucault (Hunter, 2018). From 1968 to 1979, Hall served as the director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, and despite his seeds in academia, he never considered himself an academic, but rather, "an intellectual and a teacher," (Hall, 2013). Hall's (1980) reception theory has been widely accepted and used by researchers of media and communication studies, specifically what he calls "encoding and decoding," (Shaw, 2017).

Hall's decoding readings: dominant, negotiated, or oppositional

Hall's (1980) reception theory argues that media produce and "code" their text with meaning, but there are different ways an audience will "decode" the text. This is not a linear or straightforward process as there are many factors that can influence how an audience decodes the messages of a given text or communication medium. For example, in film studies, factors such as culture, production budget, sets, casting, lighting, wardrobe, and makeup can affect an audience's interpretation or decoding of a message that the producers of a film are trying to send. A production with a low budget may result in a low-quality creation and this could influence how effective a film's message is communicated to its audience. Hall (1980) claims that an audience can decode a message in one of three ways: as the dominant reading, negotiated reading, or oppositional reading. Connecting back to film studies once again, the dominant reading is when the audience decodes the message the same way the producers had coded it or intended. In the negotiated reading, the audience understands what the producers had intended, but also adapts parts to fit within the audience's beliefs and ideologies. In the third and final reading, the oppositional reading, the audience rejects the producers' coded messages despite understanding

what the producer had intended. In other words, the audience dismisses the producer's denotative or connotative meanings. While this may seem obvious to us now, this was an important theory in its time (Woodstock, 2016). Through his theory of reception, Hall is communicating to us that the media decoders (i.e., the audience) also partake in reproducing the denotative and connotative messages.

The notion that audiences disseminate the intended or unintended meanings of media can be viewed as having the capacity to be amplified with the help of social media. Today, social media plays a significant role in appropriating media and enacting positions of "decoding." As Sender and Decherney (2016) note, "Hall's observation that consumers of information are also its producers has only found greater expression in social media" (p. 382). This is not to say that the act of decoding and meaning making was nonexistent prior to the digital age. It can be assumed that similar deciphering was conducted through other communication methods, such as word of mouth. One may have attended a stage production or play and later discussed its intricacies with fellow viewers or friends, family, and colleagues who did not see the production themselves. This too is an example of how consumers of information act as producers of that very information. As Sender and Decherney (2016) point out, the challenge now becomes rising "to Hall's charge and [getting] our hands dirty, to invest our scholarly activities with the politics of the popular" (p. 382). It is in this sense that I regard it as important to examine how online audiences develop their own interpretations of the messages in popular films. At the core of this examination is understanding Hall's model in the digital age.

Encoding/decoding in the digital media age

During the age of social media, Hall's encoding/decoding model works in a similar fashion, but it also has unique factors specific to digital communication. Three of these unique

factors – reproduction and circulation, increased dialogue, and avoidance of the physical artifact itself – will be discussed in this section. These factors are creating a new layer of how the public interacts with journalism, producing a new forum for the exchange of ideas, and the physical affordances of communication technologies.

During the twenty-first century's digital age, we continue to see Hall's claims about communication described by Sender and Decherney (2016) as "everyday life [influencing] communication at each stage of production, distribution, and reception, and he described the fluid and negotiated make up of identities" (p. 382). There are many examples that illustrate how social media has enhanced Hall's encoding/decoding model. First, we can look to the field of journalism. Bødker (2016) refers to Hall's encoding/decoding model as a "circular movement or a reproduction of culture through media" (p. 409). He argues that the model of reproduction is enhanced by social media users interfering in contemporary digital journalism – an act that was historically policed and conducted by political and media institutions only. Consuming information and subsequently publishing opinions on social media about politicians, policies, and the media coverage are activities that have enriched Hall's encoding/decoding model and further developed it to gather a greater understanding of social media's role in digital journalism. Additionally, a study conducted by Olausson (2020) provides another outlook on how social media intensified Hall's encoding/decoding model. In a receptive study of discussions between YouTube users about two films that were part of a nature campaign, Olausson (2020) explains how the exchanges between users in the YouTube comments section of the films helped develop a stronger understanding of the encoded messages presented in the films. Commenters added further insight into discussions about the nature-human relationship by providing their own dominant and negotiated readings. For example, users metaphorically identified humans as a

“disease” that is hurting the planet (Olausson, 2020, p. 280). Olausson (2020) argues that “the dominant interpretations [by YouTube users and the film’s audience] do not only reconstruct the encoded meanings of the films, but actually strengthen them by adding the disease metaphor” (p. 282). Here it is apparent that discussions on social media platforms can foster further understanding of issues and ideas through Hall’s model of decoded readings. It may seem ironic that something digital, such as YouTube – an online media communication platform – can in fact connect people to mother nature – something seemingly far from and quite the opposite of a computerized world. To this degree, the workings of this MRP are similar to that in Olausson’s (2020) study as it analyzes how Twitter users redefine and make meaning of the racial stereotypes presented in three sports films to ultimately understand and formulate ways young people can practice critical thinking when viewing racial stereotypes in films or other forms of communication media.

However, social media has distinct affordances that require reconsideration of Hall’s model. In her study of media resisters (these are individuals who intentionally limit their media use), Woodstock (2016) emphasized people’s apparent ability to avoid media altogether should they choose to. They can do this by turning off their devices, not purchasing a smartphone, or limiting their time online. Concerns that entice media resisters to avoid media altogether are commercialism, inaccurate or false information, disturbance, and partiality (Woodstock, 2016). To this degree, Woodstock’s (2016) study shows us how the affordances of a media technology artifact – this is, the physical object – complicates Hall’s encoding/decoding model as the ability to do something as simple as turning off the device limits the information a person encounters, in turn restricting the amount of decoding the person will conduct. Though this is beyond the scope of this MRP, Woodstock’s (2016) research also showcases an area of study in communication

and technology about the intersection of technology as a physical artifact and how people of a society make use of technology and digital media.

Barthes' five codes within semiotics

In addition to Hall's encoding/decoding model, Barthes' five semiotic codes help further support the focus of my research on how social media users repurpose and redefine racial stereotypes presented in *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009). The first step in understanding the repurposing is understanding what meaning audiences draw from the films, and Barthes gives us tools to examine this. Beyond the different readings people conduct – using Hall's model – to draw their own conclusions from a given text, semiotics plays a crucial role in the meaning making of communication media as well. Semiotics, as defined by Curtin (2009), is “how representation, in the broad sense (language, images, objects) generates meanings or the processes by which we comprehend or attribute meaning” (p. 51). Semiotics therefore engage in the study of what we refer to as ‘signs’ as well as the study of what may ‘represent’ something else (Dianiya, 2020). Barthes' work has been used greatly when studying semiotics. He was first to apply semiotics to visual images including films, photography, and advertising (Dianiya, 2020).

Barthes' (1974) semiotic theory includes what he refers to as “the five codes” (p. 18). These five codes help dissect the process of readings and making meaning of signs. In order to better understand the way social media allows users to repurpose and redefine media messaging, we should find it helpful to take note of the backend calculating that may occur in the minds of these users, and this where Barthes' five codes are most useful. Barthes (1974) claims that signs are binary: they possess the signifier (meaning the physical form it is perceived) and the signified

(meaning how it is understood or interpreted). The five codes include hermeneutic or enigma codes, semantic codes, symbolic codes, proairetic or action codes, and cultural codes.

First, hermeneutic or enigma codes are what the name suggests – dealing with mystery. This code classifies parts of a media text that will engage and grab an audience's attention, as well as encourage them to see the full text. Film trailers have enigma codes as they show you clips of the film without giving you the full story or the result. You must watch the whole film to find out. Second, semantic codes consider parts of a text that have a connotative or concealed meaning that the audience is supposed to understand. If we use film as the text for analysis, movies that come out during the holidays heavily rely on imagery of snow and the colours red and green as we understand snow, red, and green to signify Christmas time. We also see semantic codes in the actions of characters within a film even if they are not speaking. Silent films exemplify this perfectly. Take a character that is constantly holding and dribbling a basketball. An audience can assume that the character is fond of basketball or perhaps plays the sport. Third, symbolic codes are what Barthes' (1974) describe as "multivalence" and "reversible" because there are many interpretations and cultural understandings of a given sign (p. 19). This code deals with an image (the symbol) that has come to represent something else. For instance, the heart (the image) has become a well-known symbol of love (what it represents). Fourth, proairetic or action codes are characteristic of a text that signifies something is going to occur consequently. As an example, if there is a close-up shot of a character pulling out a gun, this signifies to the viewer that the character is going to shoot another character or that a major conflict is about to befall. The fifth and final code, cultural codes, are codes that an audience will understand if they are part of a specific culture. Barthes is referring to culture here as part of demographic, albeit by ethnicity, age group, gender, or even time period. Barthes (1974) is

telling us that such demographic factors influence how an audience decodes messages. Each of the five codes are critical to making meaning of particular media texts, and in the case of this MRP, the three films: *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009).

Blackness in Contemporary Sports Culture

In dealing with the representations of the Black characters in the films, understanding how Blackness has developed in recent sports culture is necessary to grasp the societal context in which my research is conducted. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) defines his Blackness as his distinct ethnic characteristics, such as dark skin; however, the concept of Blackness stretches beyond simply the physical attributes – the darker skin – that make a person Black. Hrabovský (2013) tells us that this concept has been used for “the external and internal characteristics of the so-called ‘black group’” (p. 65). To Fred Moten (2008) blackness is fugitive. Moten (2008) argues that Fanon’s work situates Blackness as a symbol that portrays objectification, and that Blackness has become the noun that represents racism. When referring to this ideology, I make use of both Fanon and Moten’s definitions of Blackness as encompassing both the ethnic attributes of a person and the objectivity of racism that this notion represents in certain cases.

Employing Fanon’s (1967) definition, in a study of the famous basketball player, Michael Jordan, and his black skin, Andrews (1996) examined the storylines essential to Jordan’s Blackness that support many racial ideas in North American culture. The racial discourse surrounding Jordan’s skin colour leads to conclusions often associated with the Black male body in sports, such as a natural athletic ability and being a Black sports hero (Mercer, 1992). Andrews (1996) explains that Jordan’s celebrity status – one like no other athlete of his time – allowed him to strip part of his Blackness and the stereotypes associated with it, specifically in promotion

or advertising (p. 139). I imagine Moten would refer to this as stripping away the objectification of Jordan – an objectification that occurs due to him being Black. The intersectionality of race and ability are evident in this example and reflect other studies that have explored the Black race as the most dominant in athletics (Hoberman, 1997).

Though, what Andrews (1996) overlooks in this thinking is the hidden narratives associated with the decision-making in Jordan's advertisements; decisions often made by White upper-class men (Erigha, 2015). The propaganda of racial folklore alludes to the use of the Black athletic body in ways unlike the White male body. For instance, advertisements tend to depict the Black athletic body as a food lover, naked, or questioning its significance without its athleticism (Hoberman, 1997, p. xxii). To illustrate the third depiction, we can analyze a famous Nike poster. In a Nike public-service poster supporting sports in the lives of young Americans, an image of Jordan's contemplating face sits in the centre with the following questions overlapping the image: "What if there were no sports?" written in small text at the top, "Who would I be?" underneath in larger text and lastly, "Would I still be your hero?" across the bottom in the largest text. Such strategies of domestication, as Ellison (1992) describes, stem from the retributions of slavery (p. 64). Specifically, I am referring to the Black male body as insignificant without its athleticism (as represented in the Nike public-service poster of Jordan) and showcased shirtless more often than its White counterparts (Hoberman, 1997) as examples of the forms of domestication that give less power to the individual over their own body. Using Ellison's (1992) ideology, this domestication acts as a mirrored reflection of the days of slavery due to its lack in providing control to the individual over themselves and their body.

Blackness in sports media coverage

Blackness is seeing colour (Fanon, 1967), and in seeing this colour, an innate “representational system of the Other” (Gilman, 1985, p. 25) can foster stereotypes among an audience. An example of this can be seen in how Canadian media have depicted Ben Johnson, a Black sprinter, “as the ‘other’ and as a threat to the (imagined) Canadian community” (Jackson, 1998, p. 27). Discourse surrounding the media narratives of Black professional athletes has often been associated with literature on “otherness” (Lorenz & Murray, 2014). the concept of “otherness” has become prevalent in the study of Blackness and Black athletes in sports culture.

There have been clear negative portrayals of Blackness in the media coverage of Black athletes, further alluding to how Blackness is depicted in the media. In Lorenz and Murray’s (2014) research of the media coverage of Ray Emery, a Black goaltender in the National Hockey League (NHL), the scholars found that Emery was made to be an outcast or a hostile “other” despite him being Canadian born. Lorenz and Murray conceptualize Henry and Tator’s (2002) work on dominant culture outlining the term *we* as used to identify White culture as the dominant culture or the culture of the organization and the term *they* as othering communities that are different. Research has been conducted on the league’s dress code and its connotative reasoning for its inception. Lorenz and Murray’s (2014) work also presents literature on the policing of Blackness in sports leagues, such as the NBA, through the league’s dress code. The media narratives analyzed by Lorenz and Murray (2014) about the NBA’s dress code proved that the Blackness of male athletes was framed as “menacing and threatening” and in need of “surveillance and control” (Leonard, 2006, p. 175).

The Films' Tropes: White Saviour and Academically Challenged Black Student-Athlete

Examining the films' most overt tropes helps us understand what exactly social media users are redefining, and thus places my focus of research into the decoding and re-coding of the tropes in a strong position for analysis. Heavily explored in film studies is the White savior trope depicted by several characters in *The Blind Side* (2009) – most notably by Sandra Bullock's character, Leigh Anne Tuohy – and in *Glory Road* (2006) – particularly shown by the Texas Western Miners' head coach, Don Haskins, played by actor Josh Lucas. Greatly examined in sports and cultural studies is the intersection between sports and academics, as portrayed in *Coach Carter* (2005) with Samuel L. Jackson's character (the head coach of the Richmond Oilers), Ken Carter, taking desperate measures to help his high school players see the importance of good grades in school. Examined in this MRP are arguably the most noticeable tropes within the three films: the White saviour and the academically poor performing Black student-athlete. Here it is vital to discuss literature on each of the two tropes.

The dominant racial ideologies of today derive from the effects of slavery that North American society decides to either ignore or acknowledge (Hunt, 2019). In her examination of *Glory Road* (2006), Schultz (2014) uses the term “new racism” (p. 211) – an understanding from sociologist Patricia Hill Collins that she contextualizes while studying the film. Scholars of race studies claim that this view has created a developing ‘new racism’ since the late 1960s (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). New racism, Schultz (2014) explains, was coined from White Americans failing to recognize that racism is prevalent. Hunt's (2019) study on comic book films and television series adds to research on new racism. She found that social media and online discussion forums assume contexts of new racism when individuals share thoughts on the absence of diversity in comic book films as the audience of people of colour grow for in comic book culture. To Hunt

(2019), new racism “necessitates subtle, more clandestine strategies that continue to preserve White dominance in society; in other words, undercover forms of racism are replacing traditional and explicit forms” (p. 88). These clandestine strategies, Hunt (2019) argues, can in fact extend to media texts and their representations of people of colour – representations that assist in fabricating reality.

The White saviour and new racism

Hughey’s (2010) definition of a White savior film is a category of motion pictures that feature “a group of lower-class, urban, nonwhites (generally Black and Latino/a) who struggle through the social order in general, or the educational system specifically” (p. 475). Furthermore, “through the sacrifices of a White teacher [or other White savior]” the struggling character of colour is “transformed, saved and redeemed by film’s end” (p. 475). In many sports films, the White saviour(s) is a White person, family, or community banding together to help a Black male excel in athletics often through monetary means (Schultz, 2014). This individual is present in different forms in each of the three films examined in this MRP. Schultz (2014) argues that films with White saviours, like *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009), continue to marginalize Black athletes despite being framed as a character fighting for racial equality. She outlines several examples that reiterates Haskins’ position as the White saviour character in the film. First, Haskins is depicted as the first coach to find value in Black players and running a consistent all-Black lineup when in reality, numerous teams at the time had worked with mostly Black lineups. Second, we see Haskins saving the “racially coded basketball style” of the Black recruit he is trying to pick up early in the film (p. 209). Haskins teaches the player a fundamental skill that is to help improve his shot and it seems to work. As Schultz (2014) describes it, Haskins “is able to direct the player’s ‘natural’ talents through simple edification” (p. 209). This

positions Haskins as the individual needed to help re-code the Black basketball style that is proven to not work well. Third, the film places Haskins situations to react (e.g., when one of his Black player's is physically beaten by White people in a bathroom and returning to the team hotel to racial slurs written all over their rooms). In these instances, he creates a sense of camaraderie or brotherhood and shows his progressive thinking in removing colour and instead focusing on the family of the basketball team that needs to look out for one another.

In *The Blind Side* (2009), the White saviour takes on its own form, but similar to the depiction of Haskins as marginalizing the Black athlete while being framed as the individual fighting for racial equality. Pimentel and Santillanes (2015) argue that *The Blind Side* (2009), as a White savior film, muffles the narratives of the Black characters that helped Michael Oher – the young, Black football star – improve his life over the years. Some of the most overt examples of the White saviour in this film can be seen in Tuohy and her entire family. For instance, when Oher meets the Tuohy family and pays heed to their football pointers, he rapidly learns how to play football; however, the true story is that Oher was an accomplished, competitive athlete prior to meeting the family (Pimentel & Santillanes, 2015). Another example of the overt White savior trope in the film, is Tuohy becoming Oher's adoptive mother who saves him from the life of poverty that the audience is expected to believe he would have had. Depicting the Oher as a child in need of saving by a White hero positions *The Blind Side* (2009) as a White saviour film.

To this point, sports films have the power to grow the notion of Collins' new racism with their depiction of the White saviour. In *Glory Road* (2006), Haskins' decision to play an all-Black basketball lineup, appreciate the fundamentals of the game, and showcase progressive thinking by creating a brotherhood amongst his players emphasizes the Black need of White leadership in order to succeed (Descamps & Vivier, 2020). Additionally, portraying Oher's

athletic abilities as a result of the Tuohy football knowledge and Tuohy's decision to adopt Oher in *The Blind Side* (2009) illustrate the same point. Cammarota (2011) associated the White savior trope in *The Blind Side* (2009) with colour blindness in that Tuohy's (the White woman who takes it upon herself to be the illegal guardian of a struggling young Black male) effects cause the main character to transcend his Blackness. While on the surface this may seem like a positive device, it can be argued that Tuohy does not pay attention to Michael Oher's (the Black character framed to be in need of White saving) Blackness, Cammarota (2011) and other researchers call the actions of the White savior "false generosity" (Pimentel & Santillanes, p. 142). This ideology is associated with the White saviour as such a character can cause an audience to gloss over the reality of racism and the work it takes to overcome racist biases (Byassee, 2006, p. 8). It too encourages a White audience to see themselves as the White saviour in their world (Kusz, 2011, p. 128). In this instant, it is helpful to incorporate literature on gaze theory to better understand the context of encoding that takes place in film theory.

The gaze

The gaze can be found in work associated with the feminist movement and feminist film theory and has led to the concept of the male gaze. The male gaze was coined by Mulvey (1975). She argued that most Hollywood films were made in ways to satisfy the male scopophilia (their sexual pleasure). There is a strong belief that the gaze, in racial contexts, opens the possibility of agency for the oppressed group (hooks, 2003; Amad, 2013). Dating back to slavery, hooks mentions that there were "attempts to repress our/Black peoples' right to gaze" (p. 116). Using hooks' (2003) theory, it can be assumed that *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009) are made from the heterosexual, white-male gaze – shot to satisfy and reinforce a dominant viewpoint in North American culture that takes away the Black gaze and

Black people's agency, and instead only showcases the stereotypical tropes from the viewpoint of White men.

The Black person's reading of films that reinforce common tropes about the Black community may carry the oppositional gaze hooks (2003) describes. In *Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes*, Todd McGowan (2003) describes the gaze as representing "a point of identification, an ideological operation in which the spectator invests her/himself in the filmic image" (p. 28). To further understand the discourse around the Black individual's gaze of cinema, hooks' (2003) work on the oppositional gaze and her perspective as a Black woman viewing cinema is critical. In an analysis of Mulvey's (1975) work, hooks (2003) realizes why Black women developed the oppositional gaze – a gaze that meant rebelling against the repression of a Black person's right to look. Mulvey (1975) argues that Black female audiences chose not to identify with Hollywood films' characters because doing so was masquerading their true feelings towards the presented images and messaging. On the contrary, in hooks' research, viewing films from the oppositional gaze meant that Black women could critically assess Hollywood's "construction of white womanhood" (p. 122). This oppositional gaze can be used to view the three films central to this study and their digital afterlives as I question how online audiences comprehend and respond to the White saviour and the academically poor performing Black student-athlete tropes in *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009).

Furthermore, how the audience is positioned in relation to the characters in the film helps determine the audience perspective when viewing the film. Pimentel & Santillanes (2015) bring forth the concept of the spectator gaze, specifically when viewing Black life. In this concept, the scholars argue that films such as the ones part of this study, form a spectator gaze at Black life

that manifests the White experience as normal and familiar to the audience and the Black experience as unfamiliar. Here, Pimentel & Santillanes (2015) also draw on cinematic techniques that put Oher and his Blackness at a distance and force the audience to view the film from the “Tuohy gaze” and Oher as the distant Other (p. 134). They argue that the camera angles and shots force the audience to “look at Oher, not with Oher” from “the vantage point of the White characters” (p. 134). For example, in the scene where Oher is picking up the left-over popcorn in the school gym following a volleyball game, the camera angles and shots do not show us Oher’s point of view. Instead, the audience is physically aligned with the gaze of the White characters, specifically Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy.

Education as the way out: Overcoming the “ghetto-ness” of sports

The second trope significant to the research of the media texts in this MRP is the academically struggling Black student-athlete. This trope can be seen in many films about Black male athletes and is prevalent in each of the three films in this MRP (Descamps & Vivier, 2020). This trope draws on the “ghetto-ness” of Black individuals who play sports such as basketball and football and their struggles in the classroom (Hoberman, 1997). Since sports and athletics – rather than academics or other – is framed as the signature achievement of Black people (Hoberman, 1997), there becomes a lack of understanding in what playing the sport means to the Black character(s) of the film (Descamps & Vivier, 2020). As previously mentioned, Oher was an accomplished athlete prior to meeting the Tuohys in real life and sports were a significant part of his upbringing (Pimentel & Santillanes, 2015). However, in *The Blind Side* (2009), his connection to football is framed as if only possible thanks to the football teachings of the White family who open an avenue of success for him. In *Glory Road* (2006), the game of basketball means something different to the White and Black players on the team. As an example, for Harry

Flournoy, basketball became an “education outlet” when there were few channels for Black people to gain an education during the civil rights movements (Descamps & Vivier, 2020, p. 905). Though this representation is contrary to the depictions in the films, for instance, when Flournoy’s character in the film says, “I’m a black man. I don’t do rocks.” According to Descamps & Vivier (2020), other players were depicted as careless towards their education when in fact they took their studies seriously.

Other scholars have identified how in such films, playing sports is painted as a way out of poverty and away from the “ghetto” (Descamps & Vivier, 2020). In *Coach Carter* (2005), getting an education for many of the players on the basketball team was portrayed as a ticket out of the “ghetto” and the sometimes-extreme measures of their head coach (e.g., putting a lock on the gym door) helped them see this. It is important to note that while this was true for these young men, this too is a commonly depicted stereotype in student-athlete films and there can be a tendency to exaggerate how uninterested in education Black student-athletes are in these films (Smith, 1995; Pimentel & Santillanes, 2015).

Repurposing the same narrative and not providing an alternative to its racial stereotypes can be problematic as audiences miss out on other stories that depict a different Black athlete experience (Smith, 1995). The Black sports fixation, according to Hoberman (1997), “has always been a defensive response to the assault on black intelligence” and it has framed sports as “the signature achievement of Black America” (Ch. 1: The African-American Sports Fixation, para. 10). What is most troublesome in the cycle of disseminating the narrative of the ghetto Black athlete who struggles in school and needs sports to succeed in life is that there comes a point when this narrative becomes the dominant ideology of the Black male athlete. In framing only

one experience or selective experiences of a Black student athlete, it can begin to take its place in society as the only Black student-athlete narrative.

Sports films as a teaching tool

The White saviour film, as a genre, is widespread and problematic (Kocurek, 2015). Scholars have compiled substantial qualitative research on the content of these films (Foster, 2009; Moore & Pierce, 2007; Stoddard & Marcus, 2006), but there is limited literature on how audience decode and comprehend White saviour films (Hughey, 2010). Moreover, while we know many African American athletes do not achieve the minimum SAT score for entrance into college or university, media texts do not share the narratives of the many that do (Smith, 1995). For this, it is necessary to mention that sports films, as a text for analysis, can act as a powerful teaching tool in modern day society. Educators recognize the function of these films with stereotypical narratives of the Black male athlete experience and how lessons can be drawn from these texts (Schultz, 2014). Sports sociologist, Harry Edwards (1973), has provided years of research against the socially constructed ideology of sports as a reinforcement of a Black male's life struggles (p. 44). The tropes and narratives associated with many sports films, as in the movies examined in this paper, elevate the very notion Edwards is trying to debunk in his years of research.

Racialized sports films can step into contextual misrepresentations of the Black experience. Films, as a pedagogical tool, have been used as part of lesson plans for education in social work, psychoanalysis, medicine, media literacy, and even the history of sports (Liles, 2007; Edwards, 2010; Baños & Bosch, 2015; Davide & Tafuri, 2019). It is important to note that the reasons for using a film as a teaching tool may not apply to all students. In his experience teaching *The Birth of a Nation* – a 1915 silent motion picture used in films studies to analyze an

“extreme commitment to white supremacy” and the racial misrepresentations of Black people (Parsons, 2015, p. 596) – McEwan (2007) explains his position as a White male teaching the film; further illustrating the complexity of using film as a pedagogical instrument. A student asked why they were studying this film in his class. McEwan (2007) describes the “fundamental issue” that is at the heart of this student’s question (p. 99); the issue being that as an “African American woman living in Chicago, she did not need any lessons in racism, least of all from me, a white Canadian ten years her junior” (p. 99). From this, McEwan (2007) identified that he did not need to give all students in class “a sense of the depths of American racism” (p. 99). Instead, for some it was already an inherent part of their lives. McEwan (2007) also points out that *The Birth of a Nation* can be easily replaced by other films because there is risk in it letting it represent a decade of silent cinema and because it is possible to teach its implications and cinematic techniques with other media text.

Twitter Sphere as an Emphasis of Research

Twitter has become a popular and frequently observed social media platform in which films are discussed and dissected through the combination text, still, and moving images (Anger & Kittl, 2011). As such, I have chosen to focus on this specific area of film reception, examining the decoding of the tropes in these films, as well as the re-coding of the tropes through a social media based pedagogical project. Twitter, as described by Takhteyev, Gruzd, and Wellman (2012) is an internet-based “micro-blogging service that allows users to post and read short messages” (p. 73) and these messages are called tweets. Tweets can be viewed anonymously, though the preferred method is to create a Twitter account. Twitter has become a significant tool in network analysis (Butts & Acton, 2010), deeming it incredibly useful in the dissemination of the repurposed and redefined meanings and understandings of a media text. Twitter’s unique

attributes, such as retweeting (sharing another tweet), quote tweets (sharing another tweet while adding your text to the tweet), likes (showing approval or likeness of a tweet), hashtags (a means of connecting tweets related to a particular subject matter using the hashtag symbol, #, known as the number sign) and followers (accounts that publicly claim to view your tweets), have been used as quantitative metrics of analysis for researchers studying Twitter (Viguria, Alvarez-Mon, Llaverro-Valero, Del Barco, Ortuño, & Alvarez-Mon, 2020; Nesi, Pantaleo, Paoli, & Zaza, 2018). Twitter, as a subject of study, has been analyzed both for its quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. As a quantitative analysis, scholars have examined Twitter in a number of ways, including tracking the number of times a hashtag was used (Viguria, et al., 2020), how often a term or phrase has been tweeted (Budhwani & Sun, 2020), and even measuring the retweet susceptibility of certain tweets (Nesi et al., 2018).

What is most significant to this MRP is the qualitative body of research that exists on this social media platform. Twitter's multimodal features – that is, its retweets, quote tweets, likes, replies, hashtags, followers, and ability to share images, videos, audio, and webpages – allow for greater room for analysis of the context and content of tweets. Twitter has been examined for the words and messages expressed by users through their tweets. For instance, Talbot, O'Dwyer, Clare, Heaton, and Anderson (2020) examined how people with dementia use Twitter, concluding that the users communicated their personal identities and lived experiences while conveying positive messages about dementia. Other scholars have studied Twitter as a tool for health services research (Hays & Daker-White, 2015), as a means of risk communication helping to circulate prevention messages (Sleigh, Amann, Schneider, & Vayena, 2021), and for how it allows youth to engage in grieving over the loss of a loved one (Patton, MacBeth, Schoenebeck, Shear, & McKeown, 2018). The multimedia dimension of this social platform has also been

examined. Researchers have analyzed the kind of images shared on Twitter and their relevance (Chen & Dredze, 2018; Somerfield, Mortimer, & Evans, 2018).

Twitter and young people

With its ubiquitous role in youth culture, Twitter serves as a strong platform to understand the views about *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009) and learn about the films' digital afterlives, as well as support the pedagogical creation of this project. Twitter has been viewed as having influence and providing mobilization, particularly for young people, and as a result, this platform deserves careful analysis of tweets (Murthy, Gross, & Pensavalle, 2016). Analyzing Twitter patterns, trends, and users have become popular in research since the social media platform started (Murthy et al., 2016). In 2012, the Pew Internet and American Life Project found 15% of internet users in America were on Twitter (Smith & Brenner, 2012). In 2018, Twitter was one of the top five most popular online platforms among teenagers (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), further illustrating its importance to the pedagogical element of this MRP as the views shared on the platform support the purpose of the accompanying assignment, which encourages critical dialogue amongst young people online. According to Sharma (2013), race and ethnicity have also become important aspects of studying Twitter. Madden et al., (2013) discovered African American teenagers were more likely to use Twitter than their White counterparts.

Research Questions

The literature review summarized discourse on decoding media messages, Black representation, the White saviour and the academically poor performing Black student-athlete tropes, and Twitter as a research domain relevant to young people. The research questions emerge from and build on this literature to investigate the way social media permits Twitter users to repurpose and redefine racial stereotypes presented in Hollywood. Furthermore, what is at stake here is how we can use this understanding to teach young people how to be critical thinkers when analyzing racial clichés in film. Thus, this MRP asks the following research questions:

RQ1: How is the White saviour trope enacted in *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009) and how is the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope enacted in *Coach Carter* (2005)?

RQ2: How are these tropes presented, digested, domesticated, and challenged in popular culture, namely on Twitter, or in other words, what are some of the digital afterlives of these films?

RQ3: How might we encourage young people to decode messages and tropes that reinforce negative stereotypes about the Black male athlete in Hollywood films and challenge the messages and tropes through recoding via social media?

Ultimately, the research questions aim to understand the ways in which Twitter users present their own meanings of the racial tropes presented in Hollywood films and whether their understanding challenges the dominant reading of the film and its morals. The first research question (RQ1) serves as an introduction to the context of this MRP. While it is not the main purpose of this paper, this research question is meant to lay the groundwork for the comparative media analysis that follows. This thinking includes viewing the films with a critical eye to

pinpoint examples of how the tropes are enacted in the films. It is necessary to conduct this preliminary thinking to conduct a thorough analysis of the proceeding two research questions. The literature review is helpful in providing this preliminary information as it outlines several examples from scholars who have identified the trope's enactments in the films. I encourage readers to review the literature review for an understanding of the tropes in the films, especially readers who are unfamiliar with the films.

The second research question (RQ2) is central to this MRP. It examines how Twitter users repurpose and redefine the tropes in the films. Throughout this paper, when referring to the digital afterlife, I use a combination of Soep (2012) and Savin-Baden's (2019) definitions. The digital afterlife is "a virtual space, where information, assets, legacies and remains reside as part of the cyber soul and assumes a digital presence that may or may not continue to exist" (Savin-Baden's (2019, p. 303) and it is in this space where "the original intentions of media makers emerge from this process in recontextualized form" (Soep, 2012, p. 93). As Soep (2012) indicates, "every networked action by a user has the potential to be reinterpreted by other users" (p. 93) and it is this reinterpretation that this research question seeks to uncover. This will help us identify dimensions of media literacy that Twitter users and audiences of these films devise by examining themes, patterns, and trends that have developed on Twitter from the decoding of these films and their messages.

In the third research question (RQ3), I refer to Bolter and Grusin's (1999) notion of remediation; that is, "the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another" (p. 59). Remediation, they argue, is "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (p. 273). The purpose of this research question is to mobilize previous research on meaning making and semiotics of media texts, as well as the tropes in the

three films – as gathered in the literature review – with the findings from RQ2. This serves as the direction for the creation of a media literacy assignment that helps young students critically engage with media texts by asking them to challenge the conventions within these films and the role social media can play in critical and creative resistance and reimagination. I present the findings for RQ3 in the form of a media literacy assignment that I have created for middle school students after analyzing the findings for RQ2. The assignment will be discussed in the discussion section of the paper. Furthermore, the assignment aims to encourage students to think about how to remediate parts of the film with social media – a kind of digital *détournement* (Debord & Nicholson-Smith, 1994) or rewiring of the messages presented.

Methodology

Data Collection: Gathering of Tweet Corpus

Tweet contents

To gather tweets about *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009), the tweet curation tool, TweetDeck, was used. The search criteria set to view tweets in the year 2020 and the movie titles were part of the search terms as that is the most relevant content. Additionally, ambiguous content can arise as indicated in the preliminary TweetDeck search conducted for the MRP proposal. Tweets unrelated to the films, but having the same terms, did appear in the sample of tweets; however, the irreverent tweets were ignored for this project. Retweets and replies were excluded from the data set to easily view original content tweeted by the user and because the number of retweets can be identified from the original tweet if the amount is deemed significant. All tweets are written in English. The images below show the exact tweet criteria for each film's TweetDeck search.

Tweet date range

The search results were set to tweets from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020. Having a single year time frame results in a smaller tweet corpus, thus allowing me to conduct a close and detailed reading of the tweets available. The year 2020 was considered for the surge of the Black Lives Matter global movement sparked by the murder of George Floyd in the United States (Barrie, 2020) and for the sports world's involvement in social justice action – specially the basketball and football communities – showing support while making promises of equity, diversity, and inclusion during this time (Staff, 2021).

Use of Twitter

The significance in understanding representation in online media is ever more critical with the increasing dependence on online spaces as forums for public and private discourse which has – intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision to use Twitter and analyze tweets was made for two reasons that emerged from previous research outlined in the literature review. First, Twitter is multimodal as illustrated in the literature review with the ability to analyze tweets that can contain images, videos, text, sound, and hashtags – elements that allow broader room for analysis and are significant to decoding the meaning within the tweets. Second, Twitter has been viewed as having influence and providing mobilization, particularly for young people, and as a result, this platform deserves careful analysis of the tweets that will carry a digital afterlife (Murthy et al., 2016).

Data Analysis: How to Decode the Tweets

Conducting a critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be used for outlining tropes within the films, identifying lessons that the film’s Twitter audience pay greater attention to and degrees to which audiences oppose, negotiate, or accept the tropes. This, too, will assist in creating a thorough and compelling media literacy assignment for middle school students. As a research method, CDA “seeks to link language and its modes of use to the significance of power and social difference in society” (Bryman, 2012, p. 528). For this reason, CDA is the most suitable method of analysis for the three parts of this paper, each part imploring a close reading of the power and social relationships that exist in the films and in the subsequent tweets that will be identified. For what is asked of this project, by way of the research questions, a method that allows fluidity and crossover of analyzing socio-cultural ideologies, script and character dialogue, cinematography,

narrative structure, and lessons or morals an audience may walk away with – or in other words, meaning to social life – is critical.

Alleviating concerns of critical discourse analysis

Additionally, critical discourse analysis has its drawbacks. For instance, CDA is often criticized as a methodology with an apparent level of bias – a lack of objectivity frequently associated with sampling. In their analysis of the strengths and shortcomings of discourse analysis, Aydın-Düzgit and Rumelili (2019) note that for CDA specifically “sampling may also be based around certain key events and developments concerning the research question at hand,” (p. 300). It is necessary to acknowledge this partiality in my positionality statement, but furthermore, it illustrates the suitability of this research method for such a project as the research questions were sparked by the current climate around social justice at the time of this paper.

Stating the obvious is another criticism of the critical discourse analysis approach; however, Aydın-Düzgit and Rumelili (2019) counter this criticism by mentioning “even politically informed individuals may not be able to see through the complex dynamics behind the (re)production and effects of discourse” (p. 301). Consequently, stating the obvious can be helpful as what may be obvious to some, may not be obvious to others. The authors, too, mention that the theoretical bases of discourse analysis generally deny “the possibility of full objectivity in the first place” (p. 301). Aydın-Düzgit and Rumelili (2019) draw emphasis on CDA in this context as it positions the researcher to take a political stance. It would be naive to assume the researcher (myself) is purely objective. To mitigate this concern, I outline my positionality as a researcher in the final subsection of the methodology. I also acknowledge that I approach my analysis through a social constructivist lens – a perspective that bridges truth and reality, as well as fact and meaning (Kempf, 2006). The purpose of this analysis is not to gather conclusions of

fact, but rather, to create an open discussion about the meanings of these films beyond the racial ideologies they are often associated with. By looking beyond the racial stereotypes in the films and analyzing the films' meanings on Twitter (i.e., analyzing their digital afterlives), we can formulate a greater understanding about what these films mean to audiences in the present day. We can then use this knowledge to determine different perspectives of the films and help young people develop their critical thinking skills in media literacy. By addressing criticisms of apparency and bias, critical discourse analysis allows room for the discussion between fact and meaning in critical media studies which justifies its selection for this project.

Categorizing and coding the tweets

The purpose of this project is to examine the ways social media users repurpose and redefine the racial stereotypes presented in *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009). Therefore, the goal of this analysis is to identify sentiments and themes by Twitter audiences of the films. The themes I identify derive from the Twitter users' decoding of the lessons and morals in each film. For further clarification, this is not a data-heavy or quantitative social media analysis. Instead, the analysis asks for a close reading of tweets to outline the types of sentiments and specific themes presented in tweets about the films in 2020.

Utilizing sentiment analysis helps classify text as either positive, negative, and sometimes neutral (Chaturvedi, Cambria, Welsch, & Herrera, 2018). In my analysis, tweet themes are labelled as positive, negative, or neutral in sentiment. See Appendix A for a summary of what I classify as a positive, negative, or neutral theme sentiment. Additionally, I identify topics and subject matters that are frequent among the tweets of the films. For each film, I identify three themes relevant to this study.

Development of Media Literacy Assignment

The final element of this MRP is the creation of a school assignment. For the scope of this project, the media literacy assignment developed is geared for grades seven and eight students (middle school) as teenagers are older than children, and as previously mentioned in the literature review, teens are increasingly active on Twitter. Therefore, it can be assumed that this age group is more mentally prepared to understand and be challenged with an assignment that requires both mature, critical thinking and an understanding of the social media platform. It is also important to note that this assignment can be used as a model for an assignment made for older or younger grades. The assignment has undergone a peer-review process with two elementary school teachers – one specially a media literacy teacher – to help ensure a thorough and thought-provoking assignment.

Specifically, I used the pedagogical tools of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, & Krathwohl, 1956) and BOPPPS (Kolb, 2015) to create this assignment. The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, more commonly known as Bloom's Taxonomy, is a learning theory that educators use to focus on specific learning outcomes they want their students to accomplish (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). This theory is also used to create precise assessments on students' headway to reaching the outcomes. Figure 1 provides an overview of Bloom's Taxonomy. BOPPPS is a learning model used for complete and effective teaching, and it stresses student participation and feedback in the teaching process (Zhang, 2020). Shih and Tsai (2020) claim this model is useful for designing learning projects. Their research presented several scholars who have observed BOPPPS as a tool that can assist educators in examining "the teaching process and [finding] blind spots in their teaching to improve their teaching quality and students' learning outcomes" (p. 258). Figure 2 outlines what BOPPPS stands for. Thus, I used

both of these models to create a comprehensive and effective media literacy assignment while also using the findings from the second research question.

Figure 1

Overview of Bloom's Taxonomy from Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching

Note. Source: Armstrong, P. (2010).

Figure 2

Outline of BOPPPS from Western University's Centre for Teaching and Learning

<p>B - Bridge in: How can students be "hooked" into the lesson?</p> <p>O - Learning Outcomes: What will students be able to do, know, or value by the end of the lesson?</p> <p>P - Pre-assessment: What do students already know and how can that be used to strengthen instruction?</p> <p>P - Participation: How will students be active in their learning, and what tools and methods of instruction can we use to support that learning?</p> <p>P - Post assessment: How can we assess the learning that has taken place?</p> <p>S - Summary: How does the lesson link to future learning activities?</p>
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Note. Source: Planning Online Lessons, Western University (n.d.).

Researcher Positionality

Reflecting on one's ontological and epistemological beliefs is critical in producing and sharing honest and fair research. Holmes (2020) describes the need for researchers, especially novice ones, to reflect on their positionality when conducting qualitative research. The term positionality is defined as an individual's viewpoint – their beliefs about the social reality and their knowledge about the world – and the position they assume in relation to the research being conducted (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Bahari, 2010; Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013). As several scholars have outlined, addressing one's positionality describes the individual's ontological and epistemological assumptions (Scotland, 2012; Marsh & Furlong, 2002; Grix, 2018). Positionality influences what is being researched, how it is being researched, and what the results are (Grix, 2018). There are both fixed and fluid properties within positionality (Holmes, 2020). Some fixed aspects of positionality are gender, race, skin-colour, and nationality (Holmes, 2020). The fluid properties are subjective and involve the individual's viewpoint, but this does not mean that the viewpoint will inevitably lead to a specific perspective on a topic (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). Furthermore, within positionality, is the insider-outside debate. This concept is about positioning the researcher as an "insider" or "outsider" to the culture or subject being researched (Holmes, 2020). In question here is also whether one position gives the researcher an advantage in the research process more than the other (Weiner-Levy & Queder, 2012). If the researcher is an insider – or has a previous level of knowledge about the subject matter – this can be seen as having an advantage in the research process as they may have more information to begin with or be affected by their previous knowledge on the subject matter. The opposite may hold true for outsider researchers who may be at a disadvantage as they may be without any prior knowledge on the subject of research.

To clearly determine their positionality, researchers must conduct a self-reflection, or reflexive approach, in which they “acknowledge and disclose their selves in their research, seeking to understand their part in it, or influence on it” (Holmes, 2020, p. 2). According to Savin-Baden and Howell-Major (2013), there are four components to a strong positionality statement. The first is describing the researcher’s lenses. This can include their philosophical, personal, and theoretical beliefs. In other words, stating the “perspective through which [the researcher views] the research process” (Holmes, 2020, p. 4). The second component is stating the potential powers that will affect the research including age, political and religious views, social class, race, gender, career, and more. Third, the researcher must disclose their position on the participants involved in the project. This includes stating whether they are an insider or outsider. The fourth component Savin-Baden and Howell-Major (2013) outline is the explaining how, where, and when the project may have been influenced by the previous factors. Holmes (2020) suggests another element, time, when composing a strong positionality statement. Holmes (2020) believes “new researchers should recognize that exploring their positionality and writing a positionality statement can take considerable time and much ‘soul searching’” (p. 3). To better understand my research paradigm and ensure as much transparency as possible with my audience, I have included my own positionality statement.

My positionality statement

I approach my research through the lens of a woman of colour, a daughter of middle-class immigrants, and someone who believes racism and racial stereotypes, microaggressions, and macroaggressions exist in all societies. Throughout my life I have had many friends and colleagues who are people of colour, White, and athletes. I believe that Hollywood can and has depicted racial stereotypes in film. I have grown up watching sports films, specifically each of

the ones examined in this MRP, and am a basketball fan. I have worked in the NBA and at grassroots, high school, and university levels within the game of basketball in Canada. Specifically, I have worked in roles such as a public relations professional, community relations professional, basketball operations team manager, and journalist. I have also lived my entire life in Toronto, Canada and North American culture tends to portray dominant culture as White culture.

The research for this project was conducted during a racially cognisant time in Canadian and American societies. For instance, I conducted my research during the Black Lives Matter global movement that was sparked by the 2020 murder of George Floyd in the United States (Barrie, 2020). This created a new level of focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion within Canada and America. Upon my own observations during this time, corporations publicly vowed to hire diverse candidates for positions within their companies and took their own stance on social justice reform (Bell, 2020; Deschamps, 2020; Waymer & Logan, 2021). Some created roles that ensured their firms were an equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace. Other organizations and institutions, including Ryerson University, were taking clear stances, making monetary donations, or showing a level of support for marginalized communities, such as LGBTQ2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Two-Spirit) and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour). Stories about race and racism had become increasingly popular in journalism and on social media. The NBA, WNBA, and NFL took a stance on social injustice and made promises of equity, diversity, and inclusion within their respective leagues. My research was also conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when online communication became a heavily used medium of communicating for personal or

professional purposes. These factors have contributed to the choice of media texts in examination and the subject of racial stereotypes central to this paper.

For these aspects, I assume the position as an insider in this research as this study examines the racialized representations and the interpretations of the racialized representations of Black athletes. However, I do not claim to have a stance on whether Hollywood's racialized depictions of Black athletes are entirely problematic and false. I have struggled to come up with a conclusion to this statement during much of my adult life and I hoped this MRP would continue to add to my journey in discovering my views on this issue. I do believe that teaching young people how to be critical about the images and messages presented to them is important for a progressive and open-minded society and this has contributed to the decision to create a pedagogical element accompanying this MRP.

Findings

The intention of this MRP was to investigate the way social media permits Twitter users to repurpose and redefine racial stereotypes presented in Hollywood (RQ2). Additionally, using this understanding to teach young people how to be critical thinkers when analyzing racial clichés in film (RQ3) is presented in the form of a media literacy assignment for middle school students. While the first research question (RQ1) is not the main purpose of this paper, it lays the foundation for the comparative media analysis that follows. The literature review was helpful in providing this foundation. For this reason, I present the results of RQ1 as a synopsis of the literature review, specially related to how the White saviour trope is enacted in *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009) and how the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope enacted in *Coach Carter* (2005). Next, the results of RQ2 are presented in this section with the findings divided by each film it serves. Finally, the findings for RQ3 work differently in that they are aligned with the Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956) and BOPPPS (Kolb, 2015) learning models. Here, I provide the groundwork and my thinking for the pedagogical element I have assembled before presenting the assignment in the discussion section. For easy reference, the research questions are noted below:

RQ1: How is the White saviour trope enacted in *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009) and how is the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope enacted in *Coach Carter* (2005)?

RQ2: How are these tropes presented, digested, domesticated, and challenged in popular culture, namely on Twitter, or in other words, what are some of the digital afterlives of these films?

RQ3: How might we encourage young people to decode messages and tropes that reinforce negative stereotypes about the Black male athlete in Hollywood films and challenge the messages and tropes through recoding via social media?

RQ1 Findings: A Review of the Literature

The literature review discussed several factors related to meaning making and semiotics in media texts (Barthes, 1974; Hall, 1980; Sender & Decherney, 2016), Black representation in sports media (Fanon, 1967; Hoberman, 1997; Leonard, 2006; Moten, 2008; Lorenz & Murray, 2014), tropes in the three films under examination (Schultz, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Hunt, 2019), and Twitter as a focus for research (Sharma, 2013; Murthy et al., 2016; Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Also examined in the literature review were arguably the most prevalent tropes within all three films: the White saviour and the academically poor performing Black student-athlete. The White savior trope is depicted by several characters in *The Blind Side* (2009) – most notably by Sandra Bullock’s character, Leigh Anne Tuohy, and her family – and in *Glory Road* (2006) – particularly shown by the Texas Western Miners’ head coach, Don Haskins, played by actor Josh Lucas. In *Coach Carter* (2005, Samuel L. Jackson’s character (the head coach of the Richmond Oilers), Ken Carter, seems to be the only Black leader figure who understands the value of his players’ school grades to help them set up for a brighter future.

The White saviour is depicted throughout both *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009) in several instances. Schultz (2014) outlined some of these instances in *Glory Road* (2006). For example, Haskins is depicted as the first coach to find value in Black players and running a consistent all-Black lineup. We also see Haskins teach a Black recruit a fundamental basketball skill that helps improve his shot and it seems to work, further depicting him as the White figure who saves the Black individual from his self-destructive ways. Additionally, the

film's storyline positions Haskins as the character who creates a sense camaraderie and brotherhood amongst a racially divided team. *The Blind Side* (2009) is no stranger to the White saviour trope as well. Similarly, it has been argued that the Tuohy family marginalizes the Black athlete while being framed as the individual fighting for racial equality. Pimentel and Santillanes (2015) argue that the film quiets the narratives of the Black characters that helped Oher throughout his life and instead puts greater emphasis the help of the White characters. One examples of how the White saviour is enacted in the film is when Oher meets the Tuohy family and takes note of their football pointers. He quickly learns how to play football thanks to the Tuohy's. Another example of the overt White savior trope in the film is in Tuohy becoming Oher's adoptive mother who saves him from the life of poverty that the audience is expected to believe he would have had. The film continuously depicts Oher as a child in need of saving by a White person of power.

In *Coach Carter* (2005), the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope is explicit. What seems to be the intended message by the film's creators is that getting an education is the ticket out of the "ghetto" for the Black student-athletes. Furthermore, the film portrays the young men as disinterested in school and learning, perpetuating the narrative of young Black men neglecting education for a life in the streets with gangs. The audience is also presented with the notion of Black parents valuing their son's achievement on the court more than in the classroom, further leading to the student-athletes' poor academic performance. These examples show how the young Black men are constantly viewed as academically challenged and the audience is swayed to believe this is because they are African-American men since their coach, the school principal, their parents, and society tell them so.

RQ2 Findings: Coach Carter

The academically poor performing student-athlete trope in *Coach Carter* (2005) is not only amplified on social media, but it is also connected to the three themes identified amongst the film's tweets. While the film helps perpetuate this trope, the tweets, and the themes, offer unique perspectives on teachable moments that can arise from this frequent cliché in movies involving young, Black, male athletes. Three themes that emerged in my analysis of the *Coach Carter* (2005) tweets and are outlined in this section. The first theme, "Our Deepest Fear," draws attention to one of the film's key messages and gestures to what seems like the audience's dominant and/or negotiated readings of the deepest fear message Carter continuously alludes to his players. The second theme, "Education > Sports," points to the online audience's issue with the depiction of the racialized groups in the film further signalling the problematic role the films have in the dissemination of stereotypes. Lastly, the third theme, "Leadership and Fatherlike Coaching," explores Carter as a coach and his level of impact with his players. Beyond his impact in the film, this theme shows how much audiences, too, respect the character and view him as a mentor in their own lives, using his teachings (such as the first theme) to lead a better life. Here, I also make note of a subtheme of "Discipline" in which the audience centres on a specific lesson they were able to pick out from the leadership and coaching of Carter; further alluding to the impact the film has on its audience.

Theme 1: Our Deepest Fear

The tweets reveal the common theme that I refer to as "Our Deepest Fear." I have labelled this theme as positive in sentiment as the tweets indicate that the users fall in with the message of this theme. This is a quote repeated numerous times throughout the film. In the movie, Carter is known for asking his players, "What's your deepest fear?" to which the players

often respond confused or unsure of what their coach is trying to point out with such a question. The film builds to a climactic scene in which the team decides to follow their coach's lead and boycott playing basketball to focus on their schoolwork despite the community pressuring them to play. In the scene, one of the players, Timo Cruz, answers his coach's ceaseless question by reciting parts of a famous Marianne Williamson (1992) quote:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were all meant to shine as children do. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And, as we let our own light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others. (Carter, 2005, 1:46:16)

This quote serves as a common thread throughout many tweets in my corpus about the film. A large number of Twitter users either directly quoted the lines, shared a link to the scene, or tweeted out Carter's very question, "What's your deepest fear?" to their audiences. Many who tweeted the exact quote also shared positive sentiment about how impactful the quote was to them, using words such as "beautiful," "powerful," and "moving" to describe their opinions.

Additionally, there was a high use of images and videos in tweets of this theme. Users posted images, graphics, GIFS, and videos that showcased the moment Cruz said these lines. The images, graphics, and GIFS often included a moment of Cruz in the scene. Other multimedia included stills of the team doing their schoolwork and some moments of the team on the court listening to their Carter's instruction. The videos attached to the tweets in this theme were often a clip of the entire scene or a part of it. Figures 6-10 present some tweets from this theme. It is

evident that this quote resonated with the film’s online audiences, and this may help provide a glimpse into how viewers have decided to decode the meaning of this particular message of the film.

Figures 3-7

Tweets from Coach Carter (2005) Theme 1: Our Deepest Fear

Figure 3

Figure 6

Figure 4

Figure 7

Figure 5

Theme 2: Education > Sports

The second theme, “Education > Sports,” I label as negative in sentiment because users describe a disagreement towards the importance of sports rather than education in the film while also taking issue with how the film reiterates racial stereotypes in relation to Black young men and education. This theme was derived from Twitter users’ evident awareness of the film’s

depiction of Black male student-athletes, voicing their reaction to how the film can be viewed as a reflection of American society's imbalance in valuing athletics more than education for racialized groups. When it came to the discussion of sports over school, a number of tweets made reference to race. Several users also referred to how the film depicts the negative views of the educational system and its leaders on students of colour. Similar to McEwan's (2007) note about the risk in letting *The Birth of a Nation* represent an entire decade of silent cinema, the sentiment in these tweets reveal the film's audience also faces a comparable dilemma about letting *Coach Carter* (2005) stand alone as a representation of the Black communities' view on academics and athletics.

Different views on how the parents were depicted in the film were expressed by Twitter users. For instance, one user, @SampsinGrey, described how the views expressed by many of the basketball parents in the film were hurting students' chances of bettering their education by tweeting, "I went to high school with really dumb [people] for the simple fact that they parents acted like the parents in coach Carter." On the contrary, another user, @funmzzzz, (pictured below in Figure 13) specifically noted the film as having "very harmful tropes" and expressed how damaging the portrayal of Black parents was in the film as it stressed the stereotype of Black parents not caring as much for education.

Figures 8-14

Tweets from Coach Carter (2005) Theme 2: Education > Sports

Figure 8

Figure 11

Figure 13

Figure 9

Figure 12

Figure 14

Figure 10

Theme 3: Leadership and Fatherlike Coaching

The third theme that consistently appeared throughout my close reading of the tweets I refer to as “Leadership and Fatherlike Coaching.” This theme is positive in sentiment. The relationship between parent-coach and child- or youth-athlete has been explored in literature. Studies have been conducted to identify the positive or negative effects of playing for a coach who is also the athlete’s father (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). More specifically, Graham, Dixon, and Hazen-Swann (2016) studied how fathers use sport as a means of fulfilling their duties as a parent and the consequences this has for youth sport organizations.

However, the pattern which emerged from the tweets indicated a different perspective prevalent to the film's online audience. Users online chose to turn their gaze to Carter's coaching strategy as opposed to considering the consequences of the parent-coach and athlete relationship – which can be studied in *Coach Carter* (2005) as one of the film's subplots is of Carter's son playing on the team he coaches. The tweets identify Carter as a father figure to the young men on the team, as well as to the views of the film, as he cared for success both on and off the court. This identification indicates how much audiences esteem Carter, the character, and view him as a mentor in their own lives. Some users have described Carter as a great leader and a hero. User @warsame_words (pictured in Figure 19) described Carter as an “unseen hero” in the academic and home spheres, meaning a hero who is not famous, but just as meaningful as the lineup of historic heroes.

Theme 3.1: Discipline

Within this theme I also identified a subtheme of “Discipline.” This theme suggests that Carter's character and the way he is portrayed in the film is incredibly impactful in real life with audiences pulling from the lessons he tries to give his team, almost framing him as a catalyst for developing positive habits. Figure 20 brings attention to one of Carter's coaching values: discipline. Throughout the film, the viewers are guided by Carter's teaching of discipline, and it is clear audiences have accepted this. A number of ideas were shared among the tweets about Carter's ability to instill discipline in his players including viewers feeling inspired to become more self-disciplined, sports as a realm of teaching hard work and discipline, and some audiences were reminded of the good coaches they had in their respective sports activities.

In addition, the idea of discipline was also linked with hard work and respect in many tweets within this subtheme. For instance, @genesis_ulloa15, tweeted, “I'm a big believer in the

power that sports has on any individual. The discipline, hard work & determination that is instilled in everyone on the field or on the court is demonstrated so well through *Gridiron Gang* & *Coach Carter*. Forever my favorite sports movies #SportsChangeLives.” User @Pajpunisher posted, “Coach Carter what a movie! For any sport shows kids discipline respect hard work and education is key, most of all that street life never wins 🙌🙌🙌 @SamuelLJackson 🙌.”

Figures 15-20

Tweets from Coach Carter (2005) Theme 3: Leadership and Fatherlike Coaching

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

RQ2 Findings: Glory Road

Similar to the audience of *Coach Carter* (2005), the tweets about *Glory Road* (2006) tell us this film's audience was also able to identify and conduct different readings of the White saviour trope while also drawing connections between the depiction of the White saviour in the

film and the present day. During my close reading of the *Glory Road* (2006) tweets, I determined three themes that also relate to the literature already discussed about the film. The first theme, “(Despite) the White Saviour,” demonstrates the audiences’ ability to identify the White saviour trope and decode its meaning to ultimately draw conclusions about their likeness of the film or to garner a greater understanding of how problematic the trope can be. The second theme, “A Reflection of Today,” examines how prevalent the racism of the past, as presented in the film, is today and signals that audiences do in fact use the film to draw connections to present day society. The third theme, “A Racist History,” explores the current debate about changing the name of the University of Kentucky (UK) school arena because of its ties to racism and shows a deeper discussion that continues to be had online about realistic-fiction films – especially those filled with racial and stereotypical clichés such as the ones identified in the findings of RQ1 – as a method of research.

Theme 1: (Despite) the White Saviour

An interesting observation among the *Glory Road* (2006) tweets is that of the audience’s affection towards the film despite taking issue with the White saviour trope. Therefore, the first theme I identified in the tweets is what I allude to as “(Despite) the White Saviour.” It is clear some viewers were able to identify the trope and took issue with its messaging. For this purpose, this theme is labelled as negative. Though some users expressed opposition to the film’s White saviour messaging, several still stated their likeness to the movie. As an example, as part of a discussion about the best basketball movie, @StillFloatin718 tweeted, “For me its Glory Road...the basketball game play was fire and the story was incredible even though it was a white savior film.”

It is important to note that this theme was not particularly popular or expressed in high quantity among the tweets about the film in 2020. However, it is significant as it provides a glimpse into the audience's gaze and what some choose to accept or reject while decoding the film. It also falls in line with much of the literature that has been conducted about *Glory Road* (2006) on its White saviour depiction. While some online users were able to enjoy the film for what it was and look past the dissemination of the trope, others, as seen in Figure 25, voiced a dislike of this film and *The Blind Side* (2009), going so far as to “eliminate” both from a discussion of the top sports movie because of its part in “furthering” the White savior trope. The White saviour trope also arises in *The Blind Side* (2009) tweets and will be discussed in the film's respective section. Below are a few tweets from this theme.

Figures 21-25

Tweets from Glory Road (2006) Theme 1: (Despite) the White Saviour

Figure 21

Figure 22

Figure 23

Figure 24

Figure 25

Theme 2: A Reflection of Today

The second theme I identified amidst the tweets I call “A Reflection of Today.” This theme is positive in sentiment because the film examines and puts forth messaging of a racist history that still seems to be prevalent today, according to the movie’s Twitter audience. Users agreed with the accuracy of the messages in the film about racism, racist behaviours, and the mistreatment and discrimination of Black athletes and people, bridging a connection to the world today. In other words, this theme’s sentiment is positive because the tweets suggest a compliance with the film’s messages, expressing that the stories told in the film also exist today. By doing this, the users have shown an awareness of the film’s connection to the present day and show how they use the film to help communicate and read the coded messages the present day. For example, Figure 29, shows a tweet in which the user makes a clear connection to the current social climate referencing “all these killings and racism talk” they have been seeing. The user featured in Figure 25 also communicated the connection between the film and the present-day racial climate mentioning how in 2020 society has to “do better.” During a particularly racially heightened time in 2020, it is foreseeable that a theme such as this would arise.

Furthermore, several tweets in this theme used the hashtag BLM or the phrase Black Lives Matter, drawing a connection to the social movement of the time. There was also an increased awareness of *Gory Road* (2006) as a tool for teaching Black history. A few of these tweets were shared in Black History Month (February) while others were shared at different times of the year. For instance, user @A_Shyade tweeted, “I can’t wait to finish my Masters & become a Phys Ed teacher so I can show my class the movie *Glory Road* during black history month... this is one of my all time favorites. Cause who did they think black ppl were 🤔.” As

well, user @Euphoria_Sticks, posted, “As a mad Basketball and Black History freak, Glory Road was everything and more to me.❤️❤️.”

Figures 26-31

Tweets from Glory Road (2006) Theme 2: A Reflection of Today

Figure 26

Figure 28

Figure 30

Figure 27

Figure 29

Figure 31

Theme 3: A Racist History

I refer to the final theme I identified in this movie as “A Racist History.” This theme was derived from the school’s gymnasium name debate. The tweets demonstrated a compliance with how truthful the messages in the film were, so much so that it generated conversations about the world’s and the school’s racist history. For this reason, this theme is positive in sentiment. “A Racist History” shows how audiences draw on history presented in the film to force action today. It appears from the tweets that some audiences make use of the film beyond its purpose as

entertainment; some choose to use it as a history teaching tool. However, the tweets in this theme also provide a glimpse into the issues that may arise from using a film in this way, such as failing to do one's own research.

The University of Kentucky's arena is named after a former Kentucky basketball coach, Adolph Rupp. One of the final scenes of the film is of Haskin's all-Black Texas Western team beat Rupp's all-White team. Since the film, Rupp's character, played by actor Jon Voight, has opened up a discussion about the former coach being racist. In July 2020, ESPN published a story that claimed faculty of the university wanted a name change for Rupp Arena because the former legendary UK coach's name "has come to stand for racism and exclusion" and "alienates Black students, fans, and attendees" (Schlabach, 2020, para. 1). As previously mentioned, following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, a movement was sparked in the professional sphere that encouraged institutions and businesses to take a stance on social justice issues (Bell, 2020; Deschamps, 2020; Waymer & Logan, 2021). Twitter users expressed dislike toward Rupp's character in the film for his racist opinions and were behind the push for changing the arena name. The audience online communicated an acceptance of the coach's behaviour in the film, and because of the portrayal as a possible racist, followed suit with some audiences wanting to change the arena name. Once again, for some audiences, the film was used as a research tool on Rupp, but other Twitter users also encouraged people to research Rupp beyond just the portrayal in the movie. This is demonstrated in Figure 31 with @Alakazam_428 tweeting, "Watching Glory Road, how Kentucky still has their basketball arena named after a racist like Adolph Rupp shocks me, but it's Kentucky, so what the heck do I know."

Figures 32-36

Tweets from Glory Road (2006) Theme 3: A Racist History

Figure 32

Figure 34

Figure 36

Figure 33

Figure 35

RQ2 Findings: The Blind Side

Three themes emerged from an examination of audiences' reactions to *The Blind Side* (2009) on Twitter: "Family," "Black Pain," and "Pulling on Heartstrings." The first theme, "Family," includes Tweets that focus on the significance of the family unit, which signals how users look beyond the racial messaging in the film in order to see a family that accept Oher as their own. The second theme, "Black Pain," builds on the White saviour trope of the film by delving deeper into the notion of film as a teaching tool versus a means of alleviating White guilt. The final theme, "Pulling on Heartstrings," underscores the sentimental attachment many audiences have felt with films of these nature, alluding to the emotional indulgence audiences fulfil during the entertainment and movie experience.

Theme 1: Family

“Family” is a strong theme in *The Blind Side* (2009). Many users demonstrated an acceptance of the family unit in the film (the Tuohy family) and expressed the importance of family. This is why this theme is labelled as having a positive sentiment. As several users stated, family did not mean blood, but rather, a group that loved and supported unconditionally no matter what. For example, in Figure 37, @damselind1stres describes how the film reminds them of “how family and love [are] the most important [things] in the world” and that “family is not always by blood.” One user expressed how the film made them “want” a family. It is interesting to see how despite the racial divide that is made clear in the film between Oher and the Tuohy family, audiences of the film choose to ignore this division when it comes to the Tuohy’s creating a family which includes Oher.

Indirectly related to this theme are the number of images in tweets that depicted scenes of the family. Tweets throughout *The Blind Side* (2009) search also contained a number of images of the Tuohy family Thanksgiving dinner with Oher. The still from the film depicts a nuclear family image with a White couple, one daughter, and one son praying over their table of food. While many of the tweets containing this image were not directly about the family theme, it is worth noting that a number of family-related images were used in tweets about the film. Additionally, linked to the imagery and tweets about family was faith. As the Tuohy’s were depicted as a devout Christian family, faith was a reoccurring topic in some tweets within the family theme, such as in Figure 36.

Figures 37-41

Tweets from The Blind Side (2009) Theme 1: Family

Figure 37

Figure 39

Figure 41

Figure 38

Figure 40

Theme 2: Black Pain

The second theme identified amongst *The Blind Side* (2009) tweets is referred to as “Black Pain” and is negative in sentiment type because Twitter users went against the notion of the White saviour and took issue with the film being a form of racism education, specifically for White audiences. While the White saviour trope has been heavily discussed in this MRP, the tweets pointed out a unique perspective of the film that can perhaps dig deeper into this trope: teaching Black pain. This idea goes beyond users taking issue with the clear messaging of a Black individual needing “saving” or help by a White individual. Some users blatantly described how films, such as this one, are not a good enough form of teaching the realities of racism or the Black struggle further elaborating on the notion of film as a pedagogical tool. For example, this is demonstrated in Figure 50 with the user claiming such films are not meant to “teach you a

lesson,” especially if “reality is too tough for you.” Many tweets made it clear that they did not encourage others to use *The Blind Side* (2009) or films alike as a way of informing them about racism or the Black Lives Matter movement.

Within this theme are several other ideas that users made reference to, such as White guilt and the film being a way to alleviate that guilt, a lack of Black stories being told through the Black lens, and the problematic perpetuation of Black stereotypes. Each of these ideas were apparent in the literature discussed earlier on race and film studies specifically related to each of the films being studied. It is evident that users find *The Blind Side* (2009) problematic in a number of different ways and have taken to social media to express and draw attention to issues that can arise from such a film, specifically about the White and Black race divide.

Figures 42-50

Tweets from The Blind Side (2009) Theme 2: Black Pain

Figure 42

Figure 45

Figure 48

Figure 46

Figure 49

Figure 43

Figure 47

Figure 50

Figure 44

Theme 3: Pulling on Heartstrings

The third and final theme of *The Blind Side* (2009) tweets is about the audiences' emotions, referred to as "Pulling on Heartstrings." A significant number of tweets conveyed a

feeling of being overcome with emotion or crying despite how many times the viewer had seen the film. The theme is labelled neutral in sentiment for it does not suggest that the users comply or take issue with the messages in the film, but rather the users shared their own likeness of the film. Many users described the film as “emotional” or something that made them cry. There was a high volume of sentiments that demonstrated a likeness for the film’s ability to pull on the viewer’s heartstrings every time. I would also like to note here that *Coach Carter* (2005), too, has a high number of tweets with viewers expressing how emotional the film made them. Perhaps something can be said about films such as these and their ability to resonate with an audience through building an emotional connection.

Scholars have suggested that emotional media experiences can be indirectly rewarding in that they add to the satisfaction or fulfilment of people’s social and cerebral needs (Cupchik, 1995; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Bartsch (2012) provides proof of different types of “emotional gratification” experienced by viewers of movies and television shows. Specific to the notion of building an emotional connection with the audience are three factors Bartsch (2012) found in her study, which she refers to as: “vicarious release of emotions,” “empathic sadness,” and “social sharing of emotions.” Connections can be drawn about *The Blind Side*’s (2009) and *Coach Carter*’s (2005) ability to garner such emotion from their audiences that may support the gratification Bartsch (2012) identified.

Figures 51-56

Tweets from The Blind Side (2009) Theme 3: Pulling on Heartstrings

Figure 51

Figure 52

Figure 53

Figure 54

Figure 55

Figure 56

Overlapping Themes

It is important to mention several themes that emerged across all three films. These included the White saviour trope, mentoring, creating an emotional connection, and the best sports movie debate. First, previously discussed was the White saviour theme in the *Glory Road* (2006) tweets, but Twitter users were also able to draw on this trope in *The Blind Side* (2009). Additionally, there were several tweets that voiced feeling exhausted with the dissemination of White saviour movies. Second, mentoring in the form of coaching or fathering was another overlapping theme. Among all the tweets there was a clear connection to the films' depictions of mentoring in different forms. Third, as was discussed, many users described crying over the films under observation. This alludes to the films' abilities in developing an emotional connection with their respective audience. The final overlapping theme was that of the best

sports movie debate. A heavy number of tweets for each film were dedicated to answering questions about which movies were considered the best sports movie of all-time or the best film for their respective sport. The overlap of themes across all three films does not seem like a mere coincidence and perhaps lends itself to a separate project in which the trend of common themes the films' audiences recognize should be examined as the cycle of trope perpetuation evidently continues.

RQ3: Setting Up the Media Literacy Assignment

The findings from RQ2 suggest there is more to these films beyond the racialized messaging they present. Some users followed the messages in the films and/or demonstrated how the films challenged racial stereotypes in the “Our Deepest Fear,” “Leadership and Fatherlike Coaching,” “A Reflection of Today,” “A Racist History,” and “Family” themes. On the other hand, some users took issue with the messaging in the films and/or demonstrated how the films reiterated racial stereotypes in the “Education > Sports,” “(Despite) the White Saviour,” and “Black Pain” themes. Finally, some users neither complied or took issues with the messaging and instead documented their experience watching the films in the “Pulling on Heartstrings” theme. While this theme was specific to *The Blind Side* (2009), it is important to note that it was salient in all three films. The films fail to emphasize – with their heightened focus on stereotypical tropes of the Black male athlete experience – other morals and meanings that their Twitter audiences have been drawn to. Each of these themes provide perspective on the greater discussion to be had about social media creating space for the repurposing and redefining of films, specifically those that also carry strong racial stereotypes. This will be conducted in the discussion section of the MRP.

To facilitate this discussion in the classroom, I have reviewed the findings of the second research question and used Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956) and BOPPPS (Kolb, 2015) to create a middle school assignment that challenges students to confront the racialized tropes prevalent in the films and understand how their own decoding of a film can add relevant perspective to the meaning of a media text beyond its racial stereotypes. Furthermore, what is at stake here is how we can use the findings from RQ2 to teach young people how to be critical thinkers when analyzing racial clichés in film.

Pedagogy groundwork

To provide insight into the creation of the assignment, here, I present key aspects of media literacy in accordance with the practice of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956) and BOPPPS (Kolb, 2015) learning models. The findings from RQ2 demonstrate a broad range of topics that can be discussed about the films beyond their racial tropes. The findings also suggest there is still a need for discussing the problematic nature of these films as it relates to their depictions of racial stereotypes. Bearing this in mind, the learning outcomes that guide the development and delivery of the assignment are as follows:

By the end of this workshop, students will be able to:

1. Identify stereotypes in film and be able to recognize them in different media forms online (in videos, images, memes, and GIFS).
2. Describe and provide examples of stereotypes in film and explain why they may or may not be problematic.
3. Present their own decoding of the film in the form of a media text (video, image, meme, and GIF).
4. Practice critical thinking and understand semiotics when working with a media text.

5. Investigate, debate, and critique their decoding of the film to ultimately produce a high level of understanding in how their decoding creates new purpose and meaning for films today.

The full assignment is presented in the next section.

Discussion

From a bird's eye, this MRP set out to understand the ways in which Twitter users present their own meanings of famous sports films that occupy several racial tropes and whether their understanding challenges the dominant reading of the film and its morals during a time of heightened racial awareness in 2020. Through the three research questions, I sought to identify which tropes were depicted in *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009), investigate the way social media permits Twitter users to repurpose and redefine racial stereotypes presented in film, and determine how we can use this understanding to teach young people how to be critical thinkers when analyzing racial clichés in films.

In this section I provide an explanation of the findings of each film, revisit key theories and topics from the literature review in relation to the findings, as well as provide my own commentary on the lessons learned from this study that can be applied to further scholarly research on this matter. First, I discuss both the expected and unexpected results from the findings. I conduct this discussion in three subsections, separated by each film. Second, I discuss how these results are significant considering what is already known about the tropes enacted in the films and I comment on how my research can help advance what is previously known. Third, I present the media literacy assignment accompanying this project. Lastly, I end this section acknowledging the limitations of this project and discussing steps for future research.

Coach Carter: A Sole Representation

The themes identified in this film – “Our Deepest Fear,” “Education>Sports,” and “Leadership and Fatherlike Coaching” – have provided a deeper perspective on how the academically poor performing student-athlete trope in the movie is amplified on social media and teachable moments that can arise from this frequent cliché in movies involving young,

Black, male athletes. What can be labelled as expected amid the *Coach Carter* (2005) findings are a few elements. For instance, the themes show a high level of awareness that online audiences have about racial tropes and stereotypical depictions throughout the film. Users voiced negative opinions – through their use of words and/or images in their tweets – about how the Black athletes, their parents, the Black community, and educational leaders devalued and overlooked the importance of education, further perpetuating the common stereotype of Black people careless of or lacking in academic abilities and valuing athletics more. This observation is in line with the moment in time that the sample of tweets were collected as 2020 was a year of increased equity and social injustice awareness.

Furthermore, researchers and film makers should ask themselves questions about how such a film serves the very community it depicts. As Bulman (2005) points out, this film, with its “limited frame and dramatic distortions serve not only to entertain, but also to advance a particularly conservative political message about urban education and inequality” (p. 75). Specific to the “Education>Sports” theme, the academic underperformance of Black, male, American college athletes has been an established issue (Cooper & Hall, 2016). Cooper and Hall’s (2016) research also revealed that this demographic faced unique obstacles in their “lack of academic preparation prior to college and differential treatment on campus based on their various identities (race/ethnicity, gender, sociocultural background, and athletic status)” (p. 47). These challenges were certainly highlighted in *Coach Carter* (2005) with its depiction of some student-athletes identity struggle with the strict structure of their basketball team versus the chaos of the street life they came from, and the low academic bar set by the high school to allow the students to participate in extracurriculars. These tropes, among others, were front and centre in the film despite how problematic the propagation and the continuous dissemination of these

identities are for the very demographic they are telling the story about. In other words, how helpful is a film about a community if it contributes to the perpetuation of that very community by presenting negative socially constructed ideologies or stereotypes about the community? To what extent is it helpful or harmful for the community represented in the film to see themselves depicted as such or is it needed to create teachable moments?

Twitter users explicitly expressed they were unhappy with the perpetuation of this messaging because it continued to spread a common stereotype that forced people to view the Black community negatively and in ways that continue to feed the preconceived image of Black male student-athletes in the education system. Twitter became an online space that helped further the discussion surrounding racial tropes in cinema, especially during a time when distant communication was critical due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To view this film as solely helpful for society's understanding of urban education for Black communities or the Black community's views on education is naïve. The tweets show that audiences are using Twitter to push forward this conversation to perhaps help redefine what Black student-athletes look like in films.

However, what was unexpected from the themes is the overarching notion of the online audience's acceptance of a sole figure representing the positive quality and potential of the Black community. Specifically, the "Our Deepest Fear" and "Leadership and Fatherlike Coaching" themes speak to this. While it would have been fair to assume that users would voice frustration with such a notion because of the growing conversation of diversity during 2020, including in media, but Twitter audiences seemed to go against what McEwan (2007) recognized. That is, the impulse of letting one thing represent an incredibly vast subject. In many ways, the tweets expressed having an issue with the film's stereotypical portrayal of the Black community and users demonstrated their own negotiated and oppositional readings (Hall, 1980) of this

messaging. Though, the tweets also signalled that audience's used Carter himself as a great representation of a Black leader that Black young men need. A leader that values a college education, hard work, discipline, respect, and carefully teaches young Black men what it means to fear your own strength because only who you create your ceiling. Despite all this, what seems contradictory is the fact that users expressed taking issue with the film standing as a representation of the Black community's views on education for its youth, when the same thing is occurring on the positive end by users emphasizing Carter as the figure to pay attention to in the film for his great leadership and mentorship of the young men. What is at stake here is understanding how helpful such storytelling is if it leads to hypocritical thinking. This perspective audiences have on Carter can undermine the other mentors and leaders in the Black community that fight for the very causes as he, making it seem as though Carter is the sole representative of great leadership for young Black men when there could be others encouraging the same thinking in the community – their stories just may not have made it to the big screen.

Glory Road: The Potential to Look Beyond Racist Tropes

All three of the themes recognized from the *Glory Road* (2006) tweets – “(Despite) the White Saviour,” “A Reflection of Today,” and “A Racist History” – speak volumes to the social state of North American society in 2020. The public murders of many Black people, especially by law enforcement, in the United States (Li, 2020) seemed to have made Twitter and other social media platforms a forum to call out false narratives rooted in racism and/or other forms of discrimination and be critical of the present state of the world. It is no surprise that the themes from the tweets were highly race focused as the film's underlying messaging is about the Black and White racial divide in American history. For these reasons, the second and third themes reflected a hypothesized trends prior to conducting this study. It should be expected that given

the social climate, audiences would take issue with the racist messages presented in the film, but not because the film is perpetuating a narrative. Instead, because the very racist behaviours and words enacted in the film were true to many painful Black experiences in the 1960s.

What stands out among all three of the themes, however, is the audience's appreciation of the film *despite* – the word “despite” being key – the White saviour trope it carries heavily throughout. Several tweets ended their positive sentiments of the film with something rather similar to, “... even though it's a White saviour film,” or “... despite it being about the White saviour trope.” What is interesting to note here is that audience is showing us two key elements: first, that they were able to separate their likeness for the film and the issues they may have with it, and second, that there is room for both accepting the film's problematic messages while also appreciating what the messages could stand for depending on how one conducts a reading.

For the first element, it is refreshing to see that audiences have the ability and knowledge to conduct readings of the film's messages while both appreciating the story and drawing attention to areas that disrupt the common trope. This idea builds on the findings in Bucciferro's (2021) study about the stereotypical representations and the tendency to marginalize characters of colour in the film *Black Panther*. Bucciferro's results suggested that *Black Panther* destabilizes tropes found in Hollywood movies by “presenting characters that embody complex intersectional identities” (p.169). The findings from this study suggest that online audiences conduct the work of acknowledging and emphasizing the multifaceted identities of the characters in *Glory Road* (2006) instead of Hollywood taking on that responsibility, and the audience do this by communicating their readings of the film on Twitter in text- or media-based tweets. The findings do not definitively suggest that audiences align themselves with the oppositional gaze in the same sense as hooks (2003). Rather, what can be said is that audiences conduct levels of

Hall's (1980) readings and share their opinions online, furthering the discussion on how problematic the film is in today's context.

To the films' makers, the latter element – that is, the room created for accepting the film's problematic messages and appreciating what the messages could stand – could be a sigh of relief as it could mean that viewers do not solely deem the film in its messages. With many users expressing a love for the film because of lessons learned beyond the racial divide it depicts, this displays a high level of viewer competency in accepting the film's purpose and redefining its problematic messaging to understand both the pleasure or entertainment purpose and as true to reality purpose the film is trying to serve, despite how tricky the reality may be with its involuntary perpetuation of racial tropes. This once again alludes to the difficult challenge filmmakers and writers face when telling a story filled with stereotypes for the purpose of trying to debunk the same stereotypes.

The Blind Side: Pedagogy and Race as the Ultimate Trope

In the case of *The Blind Side* (2009), what was predictable in the findings was the audience's admiration for the film, especially considering the awards it won in 2010 (de Oca, 2012). The blockbuster hit was widely received by many sports audiences for its triumphant underdog story – the underdog being another common trope in sports films. The admiration was prevalent throughout the "Family," "Black Pain," and "Pulling on Heartstrings" themes, showing us that the film continues to hold a place in the hearts of its audience even during a time when the racial tropes are increasingly scrutinized due to the social climate of time. It is fascinating how the emotional connection that audiences seem to have built with this film's characters and story has not faded in light of the stereotypes and racial tropes the film perpetuates when such representations are under greater examination. It would seem like the Twitter audience embodies

Bartsch's (2012) two-level model of emotional gratification in the entertainment experience featured in Figure 56. Particularly, I want to draw attention to the psychosocial functions. Users showed a level of engagement with the characters in the film. Some conducted a self-reflection of their own abilities to impact someone's life and this action seemed to be inspired by the impact the Tuohy's had on Oher. It would seem as though the long-term sense of meaning that Bartsch (2012) describes holds true to *The Blind Side's* (2009) Twitter audience in 2020 as well.

Figure 57

Two-level Model of Emotional Gratification in the Entertainment Experience

Note. Source: Bartsch (2012).

What is most intriguing about this film's Twitter themes is the attention audiences have to the film as a teaching tool and what the film tells them about family. These are demonstrated in the "Black Pain" and "Family" themes, respectively. To the notion of using the film as an instrument for educating, users brought attention to how problematic this practice can be. For instance, some feared the film was a way to mitigate the White saviour in real life. This could

mean that some online audiences feel as if White individuals who “save” others may not understand how what they are doing is wrong because the film itself does not showcase that point of view. As well, this ties in the idea of White guilt. As noted by Lydecker, Hubbard, Tully, Utsey, and Mazzeo (2014), White guilt is “conceptually related to general guilt, it is distinct as a consequence of a system of oppression and racism, as opposed to being inherently rooted in the individual's experience, like general guilt” (p. 77). White guilt is similar to general guilt, but it derives from the “the process of reflecting on negative events and attributing blame ... [and] is reflection and self-imposed blame about racial injustice” (Lydecker et al., 2014, p. 77). White guilt is significant here because it can be an element for why users describe how troublesome it can be to use the film as a teaching tool. As opposed to conveying the Black gaze and depicting Black pain, the film is one-sided, portraying only the White gaze. In doing this, it can be used to lessen White guilt, especially considering its happy ending. What I deem increasingly unsettling then, is how the process of studying racism and racist stereotypes in media texts is not enough with just a film. Specifically, I fear that if unaccompanied by a thoughtful educator who encourages young students to see all sides of the text, the film alone is not a useful tool for teaching racism. To be clear, this does not mean forcing students to conform or agree with one gaze over another. Instead, I deem it necessary to use films as an exercise of critiquing and critical thinking the various readings an audience can conduct from the media text.

Another issue with using the film as a teaching tool that was expressed in the tweets is that the film, while based on a true story, is also fictional in many areas and films are used for entertainment. Because of this, viewers must be cognisant of doing their due diligence in understanding which parts are fact and which parts are fiction. This can be the responsibility of the audience, but it also can serve useful to the film’s creators. Noting the significant changes in

the true story at the end of the film would encourage a practice of honest and truthful storytelling while not completely ruining the flow of the entertainment experience. This is a common critique in movies based on true stories with *The Blind Side* (2009) and *Coach Carter* (2005) also receiving criticism for depicting a stretch-from-the-truth narrative at points in the film (de Oca, 2012; Cooper & Hall, 2016). I would like to note a positive that comes from using films that are based on true stories as a teaching tool. The lack of factual portrayals may make it easier for some people to carry out meaningful discussions over the complex, and sometimes uncomfortable, topic of race. There is potential that using a film to guide conversations of race and racism could be less uncomfortable as one does not have to single out a real person, issue, action, but rather a character, storyline, or scene. This could provide relief to some when conversing about such a personal and politically sensitive subject matter. However, it becomes messy when a film depicts an individual's reality quite accurately, as that individual could feel like the comments in a conversation about the film are directly speaking to them. Needless to say, the notion of film as a teaching tool has pros and cons that should be considered.

The "Family" theme alludes to the messiness revealed in this study and perhaps a flaw in the entire subject of racial tropes. In this theme, audiences tell us that family does not always equate to blood relation. In this sense, the element of race is removed, and this draws attention to Henry Louis Gates's (1985) observation of race as "the ultimate trope of difference" (p. 5). Is race real? Perhaps it matters who is asking this question and what benefits or drawbacks this complex idea has for the individual or group asking. Gates describes race as "the ultimate trope of difference" because it is "so very arbitrary in its application." He, like other scholars, argues that race is a social construct. It is an already read text and people use it "to will this sense of natural difference into [their] formulations." The audience seems to align with Gates' argument

in their reading of family from this film. That is, people are not much different in the sense that race may not be necessary for social connectedness or for creating a family, as in the case of Oher and the Tuohy family. It could be argued that the Tuohy's invited Oher into their family because they felt sorry for this young Black man, but what the audience tells us is that a family unit of mixed race could transcend the idea of race entirely and question its need for existence in this setting. If all that matters is having a group of people who support, love, and look out for you, does it matter what their race is? Perhaps we continue to be fed the biggest trope of all.

Media Literacy Assignment

Studying racism and racist stereotypes in media texts is not enough with just a film, and this becomes increasingly unsettling in the classroom. Students should be encouraged, at a young age, to exercise their right to critique and critically think about messages in media despite how difficult of a conversation this can be in an institutional setting. For this reason, while this project proves significant in many ways, it is equally important to produce something practical that can help foster an understanding for how to critically examine films and other media texts. Presented below is the media literacy assignment for middle school students created alongside this paper. It is encouraged that educators conduct prior lessons that introduce students to Hall's (1980) reception theory and Barthes' (1974) five codes within his semiotic theory. Encouraging students to draw meanings from media texts such as film, images, GIFs, and graphics, and challenging them to explain how they reached their thinking is significant to the assignment. This will help them become critical thinkers when examining media texts, encourage them to be inquisitive, and give them tools and knowledge to explain their thinking. I hope to have illustrated in this assignment that watching a film, participating in its meaning online, and trying to connect it with

theoretical concepts on decoding and semiotics could provide greater value to young people's learning and understanding of a media text.

Additionally, educators should explain the following beforehand to ensure students have the best background knowledge before embarking on their own journey with such an intricate and mentally demanding exercise:

Here is an overview of what teachers should discuss in detail before the assignment:

1. Media text
 - a. What is a “media text”?
 - b. The types of media texts (photo, video, written, etc.)
 - c. Its affordances
2. Tropes
 - a. What is a “trope”?
 - b. Types of tropes (racial, gendered, cultural, etc.)
 - c. How can we identify them in media texts?
 - d. Pros and cons of tropes in media texts
3. Stuart Hall's decoding-encoding model
 - a. What does it mean to decode and encode a media text?
 - b. Hall's three types of decoding, what they mean, how they work
 - i. Dominant reading
 - ii. Negotiated reading
 - iii. Oppositional reading
 - c. Why is it important to understand how audiences decode a media text?
4. Roland Barthes' five semiotic codes

- a. What is semiotics?
 - b. The five codes, what they mean, how they work
 - i. Hermeneutic or enigma codes
 - ii. Semantic codes
 - iii. Symbolic codes
 - iv. Proairetic or action codes
 - v. Cultural codes)
 - c. Why does semiotics matter? What can it tell us?
5. NOTE: It is important to provide examples throughout each step of the lesson plan to give students the space to practice their thinking before they conduct their own work.
- Below is the media literacy assignment that follows the lesson:

Movies, Media, and Messages: A Media Literacy Assignment

Why are films so powerful in perpetuating stereotypes? How are we able to identify these tropes? How do you impact the dissemination of these messages? In our increasingly digital world, people communicate ideas using various media texts, such as images, videos, graphics, memes, and GIFS. Understanding the power of a media text's messaging is critical for recognizing, describing, and analyzing film tropes, as well as for considering your role in the dissemination of the messages.

By the end of this workshop, you will be able to identify, critique, and debate the messages of a media text and produce a high level of understanding of how your own decoding and recoding of a media text creates new purpose and meaning.

Now that we have watched *The Blind Side*, discussed common tropes in the film, examined what Twitter audiences have to say about the film's messages, reviewed the three ways Stuart Hall claims an audience can decode a message (dominant reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading), and studied Roland Barthes' five semiotic codes (enigma codes, semantic codes, symbolic codes, action codes, and cultural codes), you can apply your own ideas to these concepts.

The assignment has three parts, each completed in sequence. Details for each part are below.

PART ONE: Decoding and Recoding the Text

This part of the assignment helps you identify, decode, and recode tropes in the film.

1. Identify **one** trope or message in the film in which you conducted a **dominant reading** and **one** trope or message in the film in which you conducted a **negotiated** or **oppositional reading**.
2. Visualize how you can **effectively communicate** both your readings in the form of a media text of your choice. Create a **media text** for **each** reading. Ensure your multimedia is sized appropriately for easy and clear viewing.
3. You can choose the same or different type of media text to communicate both readings from the following options:
 - Image
 - Short video (30 seconds maximum)
 - Graphic
 - Meme
 - GIF
4. Create a draft social media post, specifically for Twitter, which includes the **media text** you created and a **caption** accompanying it. You will compose **two** separate tweets, one for your dominant

reading and one for your negotiated or oppositional reading. Remember to tailor your post to a **Twitter audience** (e.g., use relevant hashtags, short and concise caption, etc.).

5. Post your tweets on Twitter and include the class hashtag (#MediaLit101). *NOTE: Your tweets must be **public**. You may use your personal Twitter account or create one for the purpose of this assignment.*

Helpful Tip:

- Consult the questions in Part Two to ensure your media texts communicate effectively.

Submission Details:

- You will submit a screenshot of your tweets with your Part Two submission, but the tweets must be posted by the due date below.
- Due: October 4, 2021, by 11:59 p.m.

PART TWO: Written Report

This part of the assignment helps you explain your thinking and analyze your media text.

1. You will submit a written report (800-1000 words, APA style, include appropriate headings throughout your report).
2. Include a title page with your name, submission date, and the title of your report.
3. Be sure to include the **screenshot** of your tweets in the report.
4. Label each of your media texts for easy reference (e.g., "Media Text 1," "Media Text 2").
5. Your report should be structured like so and must address the following:
 - **Introduction**
 - i. Include a brief introduction explaining the purpose and previewing the contents of the report.
 - **Body** (this must be done for **each** media text respectively)
 - i. What trope or message did you identify and how did you decode it? Clearly state the type of Hall reading you conducted, briefly explain the message of your media text, and describe how the film's intended purpose either coincided or differed from your interpretation.
 - ii. Why did you choose this specific media text (image, short video, graphic, meme, GIF)?
 - iii. How is it effective in conveying your readings? Be specific and provide examples using Barthes' semiotic codes.
 - iv. How did you decide on your caption? How does it support your media text?
 - v. How is your social media post useful for a Twitter audience?

vi. Why is your media text important for audiences to see?

- **Conclusion**

- i. Summarize the contents of your report.
- ii. Highlight the importance of this assignment.

Helpful Tips:

- Manage your time wisely by writing a section of your report each day.
- Use academic language and terms from the workshop.
- Remember to proofread your report.

Submission Details:

- Submit online through class drive and bring to class printed.
- Due: October 12, 2021, by 11:59 p.m.

PART THREE: Presentation and Discussion

This part of the assignment helps you critique and debate how effective your media text and caption are in communicating your decoding of the film's messages.

1. Your tweets will be presented to class. As a group we will discuss the pros and cons of your media texts and how effective they are in conveying your message. **(5 minutes)**
6. Briefly explain what tropes or messages you identified and how you conducted a dominant reading and a negotiated reading or oppositional reading. **(5 minutes)**
2. Prepare with **two** thought-provoking questions about your media texts and/or the concepts you have learned in this workshop and lead an informal class discussion. **(10 minutes)**

Helpful Tip:

- Try and make your questions open-ended, but specific.

Submission Details:

- Presentations will be held between October 13-15, 2021.

ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC

	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Media Texts /4	Strong choice for type of media texts; the media texts strongly communicate a clear message; student visually demonstrates a distinguished level of understanding of the workshop concepts; media texts posted on time and meet recommended sizing.	Good choice for type of media texts; the media texts effectively communicate a clear message; student visually demonstrates a proficient level of understanding of the workshop concepts; media texts posted on time meet recommended sizing.	Satisfactory choice for type of media texts; the media texts somewhat communicate a clear message; student visually demonstrates a developing understanding of the workshop concepts; media texts posted on time and meet recommended sizing.	Poor choice for type of media texts; the media texts somewhat communicate a clear message; student visually demonstrates a developing understanding of the workshop concepts; media texts posted late, and meet do not meet recommended sizing.
Tweets /4	Caption is strong and clear; free of spelling or grammatical errors; is fitted for a Twitter audience; tweet includes class hashtag.	Caption is good and clear; free of spelling or grammatical errors; is somewhat fitted for a Twitter audience; tweet includes class hashtag.	Caption is satisfactory and somewhat clear; has 1-2 spelling or grammatical errors; and is somewhat fitted for a Twitter audience; tweet includes class hashtag.	Caption needs improvement and is unclear; has several spelling or grammatical errors; is not fitted for a Twitter audience; tweet includes class hashtag.
Written Report /7	Report exceeds expectations in its delivery and clarity, and its display of critical thinking, reasoning, and concepts; answers all the questions; provides specific examples; formatted correctly; free of spelling and grammatical errors; meets word count; submitted on time.	Report meets expectations in its delivery and clarity, and its display of critical thinking, reasoning, and concepts; answers most of the questions; provides specific examples; formatted correctly; free of spelling and grammatical errors; meets word count; submitted on time.	Report needs improvement in its delivery and clarity, and its display of critical thinking, reasoning, and concepts; answers some of the questions; provides one example; formatted correctly; has some spelling and grammatical errors; meets word count; submitted on time.	Report needs improvement in all areas; answers less than half of the questions; provides one example; not formatted correctly; has several spelling and grammatical errors; does not meet the word count; submitted late.
Presentation /4	Presentation is well organized; provides strong analysis and examples; has appropriate content; presenter speaks clearly, with confidence and makes eye contact.	Presentation is organized; provides good analysis and examples; has appropriate content; presenter speaks clearly, with confidence and makes eye contact.	Presentation is somewhat organized; provides adequate analysis and one example; has appropriate content; presenter speaks somewhat clearly, with some confidence and makes some eye contact.	Presentation is not organized; provides little analysis and no examples; has appropriate content; presenter is unclear and makes little eye contact.
Discussion /3	Discussion leader shows respect to others' opinions; has two open-ended, specific, and thought-provoking question which showcase a high level of understanding of concepts; leads the discussion with confidence.	Discussion leader shows respect to others' opinions; has two open-ended, specific, and thought-provoking question which showcase a proficient level of understanding of concepts; leads the discussion with confidence.	Discussion leader shows respect to others' opinions; has one open-ended, specific, and thought-provoking question which showcase a satisfactory level of understanding of concepts; leads the discussion with confidence.	Discussion leader shows respect to others' opinions; is unprepared; unable to lead discussion.

Significance of the Project

This project is important for several reasons that not only support the literature that already exists on this subject matter, but for signifying how critical it can be to study the connection between film and its online audience as it is the digital afterlives of these films and the decoded messages that audiences continuously embody. This study demonstrated the connection between the big screen audiences watch and the little screen they use to communicate and push forward the big screen's conversation. As well, this project illustrated the great potential for research to help us understand how films' messages translate into the digital world and in different forms. For example, in the case of this study, words and key terms, as well as images and graphics were the two most prevalent methods used by the films' Twitter audiences to explain their ideas of the films in the digital sphere and to an online audience. Additionally, this project demonstrated just how much there is to learn from these films beyond the racial tropes they perpetuate. This study signalled the potential to learn more about the world and society by examining others' decoded readings of films instead of simply conducting a single and sole reading of films or any media text ourselves. There is much opportunity for growth in individual thinking when ideas are shared and analyzed thoughtfully. Most importantly, what I deem most impactful about this study is its revealing how complex and messy such films, and their messaging, can be. This messy and complex mental tug of war with these films' messages begs another important research question for future studies: how do we tell a true story that carries so many racial stereotypes without falling prey to perpetuating the very tropes that the film's moral is encouraging the audience to take issue with?

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

The results from this project should be assessed with respect to the following limitations. First, there was limited literature available on the Ryerson Library peer-reviewed portal about *Coach Carter* (2005) in comparison to the other two films. Therefore, the literature about *Coach Carter* (2005) in this MRP consists of a combination of scholarly research and applied theory. Another limitation to consider is the use of Twitter in the collection of sentiments and the TweetDeck platform. I, the researcher, have no prior knowledge of the inner workings of TweetDeck's and Twitter's algorithms or analytics that may contribute to the sample of tweets that appeared in the search. This may affect the sample of tweets collected for this project as it raises questions about the service Twitter's meta data provides and whether the algorithms make estimations based on search location, time, or other personal characteristics that may affect the search result of tweets (Williams, Burnap, & Sloan, 2017). Additionally, only public tweets were viewable, meaning that there could be more insight unexplored due to private Twitter accounts. Furthermore, only tweets posted in 2020 were examined for the study. Therefore, it is necessary to keep in mind that other views and opinions expressed online about the films were not included in this study and could have impacted the themes and topics discussed. Third, the themes identified were at the researcher's discretion. Researcher positionality was discussed to provide readers with meaningful context for the lens with which this study was conducted and this can help better understand why certain themes among the tweets were highlighted. Thus, the themes should be viewed with this in mind and with an understanding that other themes were also prevalent amongst the tweet corpus. Fourth, only three films were under examination as part of this project. Scholars have conducted research on several popular sports films and their tropes,

such as the film *Friday Night Lights* (2004). Hence, it must be noted that there are other films that deserve thoughtful analysis for both the tropes they perpetuate, and the discussion already held online by its audience.

Future Research

This MRP demonstrated the benefits of conducting a critical discourse analysis when studying tweets to determine the digital afterlife of popular movies, especially ones that contain stereotypical and racial tropes. What emerged from critically examining the tweets and their themes was a greater understanding of how Twitter users repurpose and redefine the messages of these film in the digital sphere and doing so by calling out the tropes for what they are while expressing other lessons learned beyond the racial storylines. What was lacking in this project was the deeper analysis of dialogue between users or user reactions to tweets, as well as further understanding the meaning of a user's tweet rather than leaving the interpretation up to the researcher. Hence, future studies may benefit from a mixed method research approach to further investigate this specific area of film and communication studies. Interviewing users who shared strong opinions on Twitter about the films and the tropes, and perhaps looking deeper into the dialogue between users in popular Twitter threads would add greater understanding and test the already existing literature on the decoding of films. Finally, further studies would also benefit from examining other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, to better understand how the digital afterlives differ from one social medium to another or how audiences communicate their decoding of a film differently depending on the platform's affordances. It would also be interesting to see how over time this examination could reveal changes and development in how online audiences communicate their repurposed or redefined ideas of a film's messages. Additionally, perhaps studying the use of emoticons in the tweets and the

greater meaning they provide about the films would also serve as a stimulating project. As M. and Babu (2020) describe it, “in order to detect opinion with greater accuracy and reliability, it is essential to ... avoid the undermining of emoticons while determining the sentiment of the user reviews” (p. 2). Lastly, the overlap of themes across all three films lends itself to potential project in which the trend of common themes recognized by a films’ audience online should be examined as the cycle of trope perpetuation evidently continues online.

Conclusion

This MRP explored the ways that social media users on Twitter repurpose and redefine racial stereotypes presented in *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009). Moreover, at the heart of this research was finding a way to use this knowledge to teach young people how to be critical thinkers when analyzing and making meaning of racial stereotypes in media texts, such as films. To do this, existing literature on meaning making and semiotics, Black representation in sports media, tropes presented in the three films, and Twitter as a realm of research focus was discussed. Second, data collection and analysis were outlined: critical discourse analysis was used because this qualitative research method allowed for a close reading of the tweets to better understand the degrees to which audiences oppose, negotiate, or accept the films' tropes. Additionally, researcher positionality was explained to properly position myself in the role as a researcher while being transparent about my biases and previous knowledge on the subject matter. Third, the findings revealed several themes existed amongst the tweets for each film showcasing how online audiences complied, took issue, or were indifferent with the messages in the films. Lastly, significant patterns in the findings were discussed to draw emphasis on how the findings provide insight into what audiences have to say about the films and how they were communicating their interpretations, as well as what the films' identities are as they continue to hold place in the digital sphere.

The current literature on these films and the Black male athletic body in sports media tell us that Blackness is prevalent in contemporary sports culture. Andrews' (1996) examination of the storylines essential to Michael Jordan's Blackness supported many racial ideas in North American culture about Black male athletes, but what is equally important is not overlooking who makes the decisions in much of sports media and advertising: White upper-class men

(Erigha, 2015). The same can be seen in the film industry and in the tropes the three films perpetuate. The two tropes examined in this study have been areas of scrutiny amongst the films. Schultz (2014) argued that films with White saviours, like *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009), continue to marginalize Black athletes despite being framed as characters fighting for racial equality. Sports films also have the power to grow the notion of “new racism” (Schultz, 2014, p. 211) with clandestine strategies that have found their way into sports films and their representations of people of colour – representations that assist in fabricating reality and alleviating White guilt (Schultz, 2014; Hunt, 2019). On the other side, the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope greatly depicted in *Coach Carter* (2005) is seen in many films about Black male athletes (Descamps & Vivier, 2020). This trope is commonly depicted in student-athlete films and there tends to be an exaggeration in how uninterested in school Black student-athletes are (Smith, 1995; Pimentel & Santillanes, 2015).

Applying this literature to how audiences repurpose and disseminate their own interpretation of the films’ tropes on Twitter was central to this study to understand what the digital afterlives of these films may look like. Twitter has been a frequently used social media platform in which films are deliberated and analysed through the combination of text and still or moving images (Anger & Kittl, 2011). Twitter has become a significant tool in network analysis (Butts & Acton, 2010) and for this it has been useful in the dissemination of the repurposed and redefined meanings and understandings of a media text. It has also been examined for the opinions expressed by users through their tweets (Talbot et al., 2020). Examining Twitter patterns, trends, and users is popular in research ever since the social media platform started (Murthy et al., 2016). The tool is also popular amongst teenagers (Anderson & Jiang, 2018) which contributed to the pedagogical element on this study.

The MRP discussed how the White saviour trope was enacted in both *Glory Road* (2006) and *The Blind Side* (2009), and how the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope was enacted in *Coach Carter* (2005). Primarily this pilot project sought to answer what the digital afterlives of these films were, namely on Twitter, and how we might be able to use this understanding to help young people decode tropes that reinforce negative stereotypes about the Black male athlete in Hollywood films and challenge the messages through recoding via social media. With respect to the digital afterlives of the films today, it is apparent from the results that each film occupies a significant space in the lives of its audience due to the sentiments expressed by each film's respective Twitter audience. *Coach Carter*'s (2005) digital afterlife seems to serve as a lesson in the importance of education and the athlete-student relationship. Through tweets containing text, images, and graphics, Twitter audiences show us that the film's purpose stretches beyond the academically poor performing Black student-athlete trope to draw emphasis on the under showcased narrative of valuing education in Black American culture. The digital afterlife of *Glory Road* (2006) appears to take the form of a stop sign, with its audience asking society to stop for moment and think. Specifically, they ask for acknowledgement of the racism that existed in the past and a pause to reflect on how much we have or have not changed as a society. To this degree, the film's digital hereafter acts as a reminder of the realities of racism and a reality-check of how much progress has been made. Lastly, *The Blind Side*'s (2009) digital afterlife seems that of a cautionary tale as the film's audience dissect what a family unit really means, how problematic it can be to use the film as a teaching tool for Black pain, and powerful it can be to draw an emotional connection with audiences. All three films seemed to inhabit a digital afterlife that is heavily text based despite the greater multimedia affordances social media platforms like Twitter offer. The pedagogical element for middle school students provided a practical example

of one approach in how we might encourage young people to decode tropes that reinforce negative stereotypes about the Black male athlete in Hollywood films, as well as challenge the messages of a media text through recoding via social media since social media culture is popular amongst this demographic (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Comprehensively, this MRP provided a glimpse into how audiences in 2020 decoded the messages in *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009). Three overarching conclusions can be made from this pilot study. First, the impact of these films continues to be strong over 10 years after hitting the box office. Second, the lessons that the films provide, as decoded by the Twitter audience, show how much can be learned from the films' digital afterlives despite each depicting commonly known problematic clichés. There can be a tendency to view films like these as solely problematic for their portrayal of racial stereotypes; however, as this study has shown, there is so much more to the films and the work of this "so much more" begins after the films' credits as audiences exchange ideas and conduct their own decoding and recoding of the films' messages to help mold each motion picture's digital afterlife. Additionally, because of this tendency, it is important to study strategies and practices that encourage audiences not to fall into the trap of labelling such films as exclusively problematic, but rather, to look at films from several angles in order to pull many ideas from them. The ideas shared online live forever and help create a life for all films long after their popularity leaves the big screen. Third, and perhaps most important in this project contributing to society, is the insights from the pedagogical element. The assignment helps challenge the single-minded thinking previously mentioned by establishing the sorts of questions one should ask themselves when analysing and drawing conclusions about a media text. This can also help put a stop to closed-minded thinking.

Future studies would benefit from a mixed method approach for a deeper analysis of the dialogue between users. For instance, interviewing users who shared strong opinions and looking more closely into the dialogue of popular Twitter threads (a chain of tweets) would provide greater insight into audience decoding of films heavy with racial clichés. Further studies on this subject would also benefit from analyzing sentiment on other social media platforms to better recognize how the digital afterlives differ from one social medium to another. Additionally, the overlapping themes across all three films provides an opportunity for learning how a films' online audience helps push forward a cycle of trope perpetuation. Overall, this MRP showed how much room there is for research in the digital afterlives of *Coach Carter* (2005), *Glory Road* (2006), and *The Blind Side* (2009), suggesting that the films' conventions of the Black male athlete have the potential to influence society's understandings of such individuals and demonstrating how the discussion is unfinished after the film is viewed. Instead, this study showcased how the conversation begins as audiences calculate the social narratives, structures, and ideologies that have been presented to them in a media text.

Appendices

Appendix A

Types of Theme Sentiments for Analysis

Theme Sentiment	Description	Example of Tweets Within the Theme
Positive	<i>Users comply with the messages in the film or demonstrate how the film challenges racial stereotypes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Coach Carter will never get old 🏀. Really good life lesson anything is possible if the effort is there 🔥 believe.” • “No movie can talk about racism in sports better than Glory Road. Excellent movie.” • “The problem isn't black and white. It's very young men. They need to be mentored, about more than football. The movie the blind side, gave you a look into it. When a coach takes on a team, he needs to be a life coach. He needs to be a father figure to some.”
Negative	<i>Users take issue with the messages in the film or demonstrate how the film reiterates racial stereotypes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “crazy a bugs life rllly had an important valuable lesson and it's a children's movie! meanwhile adults out here watching movies like the blind side loving the “white savior” message but refuse to help w BLM. so your 4 year old knows the value of equality and you don't????” • “You know it's funny, Kentucky fans hate Glory Road because it paints the team in a negative light and they can see through the Disney nonsense. But let it be a different movie with the same lies and garbage like 42 or Remember the Titans and they ignore the facts, love the lies” • “I ain't gone lie y'all the blind side movie messed my whole childhood UP. I still can't watch it, makes me too sad smh”
Neutral	<i>Users neither comply or take issue with the messages in the film or users share anecdotes about what happened in the film or users share their likeness of the film</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I haven't watched Coach Carter since I was a teen and was so excited to see it again on Netflix. Such a great film and this remains one of the best movie scenes of all time for me. youtu.be/Ybt8wXIahQU” • “Why doesn't “Glory Road” get love as a basketball movie? That movie was good lol” • “rewatching The Blind Side and realizing it's one of the worst movies of all time omg”

Appendix B

Summary of RQ2 Findings for *Coach Carter*, *Glory Road*, and *The Blind Side*

<i>Coach Carter</i> (2005)		
Theme	Theme Sentiment Type	Description
Our Deepest Fear	Positive	<p>This theme explores the question that Carter often asks his players, “What’s your deepest fear?” and the response one of his players, Timo Cruz, gives by reciting a Marianne Williamson (1992) quote. This theme draws attention to one of the film’s key messages and shows us that audiences have decoded this message through a dominant and/or negotiated reading.</p> <p>Notable User Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tweeting lines from the quote, sharing a link to the scene in which Cruz recites the quote, or posing the question to their followers • Sharing positive sentiment about how impactful the quote was to them, using words such as “beautiful,” “powerful,” and “moving” • Use of images, graphics, GIFS, and videos that showcased the moment Cruz said the lines. The images, graphics, and GIFS often included a moment of Cruz in the scene
Education > Sports	Negative	<p>This theme points to the online audience’s issue with the depiction of the racialized groups in the film and signals to the problematic role the film has in the dissemination of stereotypes. This theme revealed that online audiences are strongly aware of the films’ depiction of Black male student-athletes and note that it is troublesome for its perpetuation of stereotypes.</p> <p>Notable User Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear references to race, particularly Black communities • Blaming of parents and/or guardians for lack of educational guidance • Calling out the film’s use of racial tropes
Leadership and Fatherlike Coaching	Positive	<p>This theme analyzes the users’ choice to turn their gaze to Carter’s coaching strategies and shows us how much audiences respect the character and view him as a mentor in their own lives, using his teachings to lead a better life.</p> <p>Notable User Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claiming they learned discipline and hard work from the teaching of Carter in the film • Referring to Carter as a “hero,” “leader” and “father figure”
<i>Glory Road</i> (2006)		
Theme	Theme Sentiment Type	Description
(Despite) the White Saviour	Negative	<p>This theme is about the audience’s affection towards the film despite taking issue with the White saviour trope it depicts. This theme looks at some users who expressed opposition to the film’s White saviour messaging, but also at several who still stated their likeness of the movie. This is significant as it provides a glimpse into the audience’s gaze and provides some insight on what users choose to accept or reject while decoding the film.</p> <p>Notable User Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identifying the trope as “the White saviour” in tweets • Expressing how problematic the trope is to them

A Reflection of Today	Positive	<p>The theme examines how prevalent the racism of the past, as presented in the film, is today. It signals that audiences use the film to draw connections to present day society by measuring how much society has or has not changed. By doing this, the users have proven an awareness of the film's connection to present day and show how they use the film to help communicate and read the coded messages the present day.</p> <p>Notable User Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of #BLM or #BlackLivesMatter • Discussing a lack of Black history knowledge and the film as a teaching tool to combat this
A Racist History	Positive	<p>This theme explores the current debate surrounding the name change of the University of Kentucky school arena because of its ties to racism. It shows a deeper discussion that continues to be had online about realistic-fiction films as a method of research. This theme also provides a glimpse into the issues that may arise from using a film in this way, such as failing to do one's own research.</p>
The Blind Side (2009)		
Theme	Theme Sentiment Type	Description
Family	Positive	<p>This theme considers how users demonstrated an acceptance of the family unit in the film (the Tuohy family). It brings attention to the online audiences' decision to ignore the racial division in the film between Oher and the Tuohy's in order to accept the creation of a Tuohy family unit with Oher.</p> <p>Notable User Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing a "want" or love for family • Sharing images of the Tuohy family with Oher as the new addition • Drawing connections to faith and a devout Christian family
Black Pain	Negative	<p>This theme is about more than users going against the White saviour messaging in the film. It is about users taking issue with the notion of the White saviour film as a form of racism education, specifically for White audiences, teaching Black pain and struggle.</p> <p>Notable User Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identifying the trope in the film as the "White saviour trope" • Discouraging the use of such a film for research on BLM movement
Pulling on Heartstrings	Neutral	<p>This theme underlines the emotional attachment many audiences have felt with not only this film, but other of this nature. It alludes to the emotional indulgence audiences fulfil during the entertainment and movie experience.</p> <p>Notable User Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling overcome with emotion • Describing how the film made them cry

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