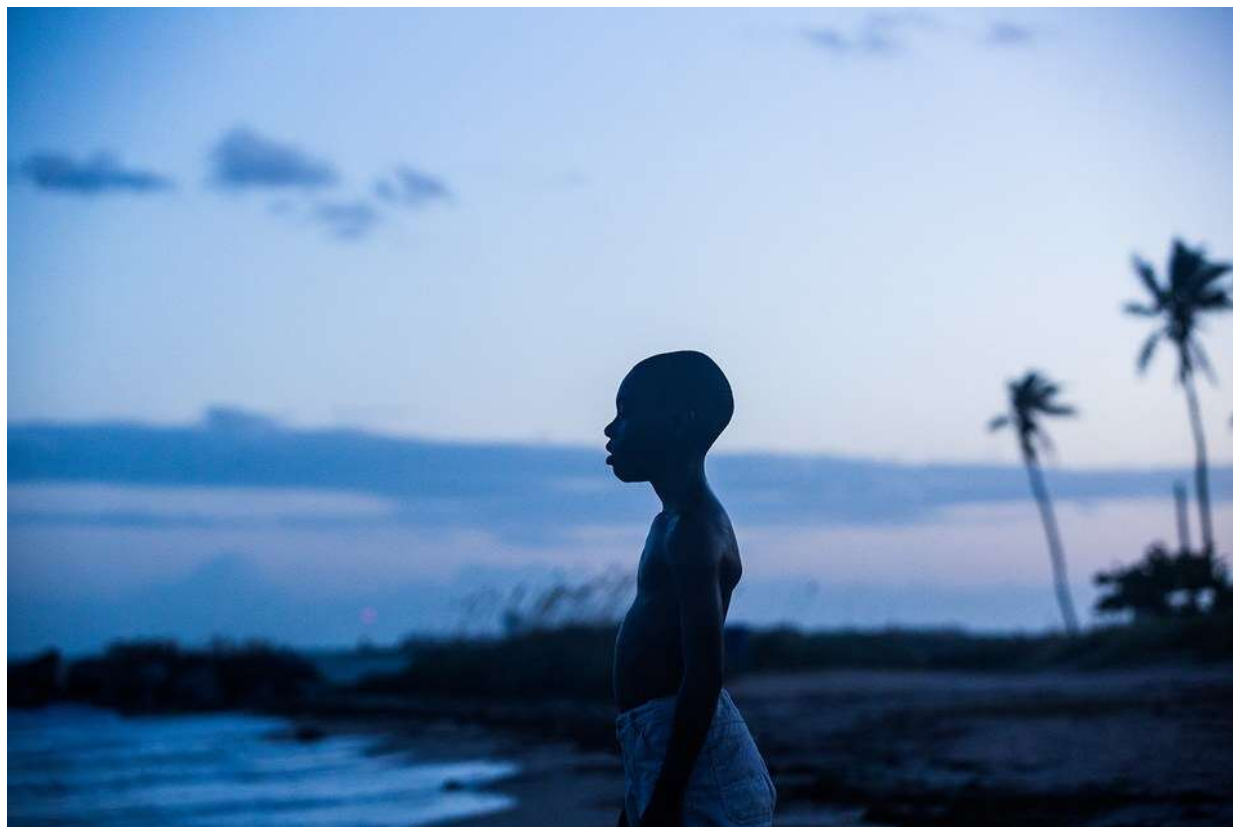


'Who Is You, Man?' - How are Blackness and Whiteness discussed in criticism of Hollywood films since #OscarsSoWhite?



Name: Andy Norstrom

Student number: 509696

E-mail: 509696an@student.eur.nl

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

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Supervisor: Pauwke Berkers

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Abstract:

In 2015, the annual Academy Awards proved highly controversial due to all twenty actors nominated for best lead and supporting roles being white. The popular news cycle following this was branded #OscarsSoWhite on social media, with a wide range of prominent actors, directors and journalists calling for greater on-screen diversity in Hollywood. Following on from these calls for diversity, this thesis aims to use this time period of 2015 - 2019 as a frame to analyze the critical reception of films released in the years after #OscarsSoWhite- examining the language of film critics to gain some understanding of how they discuss race in their reviews. In recent years, the United States has seen a high degree of political and social turbulence, with a regime change and ideological polarization, combined with a renewed intensity of debate surround the country's racial discourse following numerous cases of racial violence and ensuing civil unrest. This contextual backdrop makes research into the relationship between popular culture and the United States' racial discourse societally relevant and necessary for sociological study.

Using theory on Blackness, Whiteness and cultural criticism as the theoretical basis for this research, this thesis uses a critical discourse analysis of reviews written on a range of different films that have differing levels of diversity in the cast and crew made since 2015. Aiming to highlight the ways that critics discuss race, this thesis asks- how are Blackness and Whiteness discussed in criticism of Hollywood films since #OscarsSoWhite? The data analyzed comes from a wide range of both mainstream media and more specific online sources, with a concerted effort being made to include African-American publications and writers due to the lack of diversity amongst critics- the majority of them being White and male.

Results show that White and Black critics talk about race in very different ways, with a key distinction being in the way that the influence of their personal experience of racial discourse shapes their perspective. Critics also unanimously recognize Hollywood's historic lack of diversity, and criticize films that exhibit racial stereotypes and common narrative tropes. Analysis also shows the dominant position of Whiteness, which is also reflected through the lack of diversity amongst critics. This thesis concludes that whilst critical attitudes seem positive about a wider range of cultural perspectives being represented on-screen in the wake of #OscarsSoWhite, the lack of diversity amongst cultural mediators- the critics themselves- reifies the perspective of Whiteness in Hollywood criticism.

Keywords: Blackness, Whiteness, Film Criticism, Colourblind Racism, Film, Diversity

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1. Introduction

1.1 – Societal Relevance

“I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me”

- Ralph Ellison

The invisibility that Ellison spoke of in his 1952 novel *Invisible Man* reflected a sensibility that was felt among many African Americans in the era of the civil rights movement, that they were not recognized as natives in a country they had lived all of their lives. Du Bois (1903) was the first to identify this double-consciousness, to be both Black and American in a paradoxically mutually exclusive sense. The concept of double-consciousness has followed African Americans throughout the era of modernity, whilst the efforts of activists, scholars, artists and entertainers have strived to valorize the position of African Americans in wider American society. Race can be viewed as a socially and politically constructed issue (Gilroy 1987) that is intrinsic to the discourse surrounding developments in American culture. Those with knowledge of the United States' racial discourse would unfortunately not be surprised, that over sixty years on from the social reality that Ellison alluded to in his fiction, African Americans in many ways suffer from forms of oppression imposed on them by the hegemonic power of whiteness in the United States. Race has a paradoxical influence in the United States in that it seems to pervade all of its societal frictions, framing discourses on inequalities in the social and political worlds, whilst seemingly remaining an abstract construct rooted in colonialism that creates differences between people (Thompson & Tyagi 1996).

In the contemporary sense, racial discourse in the US has received an increase in intensity due to political volatility triggered by a number of controversial events. The recent murders of black teenagers such as Trayvon Martin have intensified the conditions of racial inequality and conflict in the US. Since Trayvon's death, and those of other African-Americans including Michael Brown, Tamir Rice and Eric Garner, their collective legacy has been to reignite the race conversation in the US (Ramaswamy 2017). With racial tensions and subsequent activism- symbolized by large scale demonstrations and civil unrest in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore along with the Black Lives Matter movement- bolstered to levels high as they have been since Barack Obama's first election in 2009, the state of society in the US has to be addressed and critiqued. In the presence of heightened racial tensions, the influence that popular culture and entertainment has upon the attitudes of Americans and vice-versa is immensely significant.

Film has, over the past hundred years, grown to become one of the most widely accessible art forms and one of the most lucrative of the cultural industries. With its capacity for visual storytelling, film in the United States has a close link to the social realities of its audiences, however there has been an ongoing problem with the diversity of narratives presented to audiences on-screen. From the early works of Oscar Micheaux in the early 20th century, to the more contemporary issues such as the #OscarsSoWhite controversy, African Americans- along

with other under-represented diasporic communities- have struggled and fought for Cinema to accurately represent the social reality that they experience (Guerrero 2017). However, it seems that the social transparency Ellison felt as a black man in the eyes of the white-dominant culture of the US has pervaded the film industry for African Americans and other diasporic communities. Therefore, it has become essential to examine the ways in which race and diversity are discussed by those in positions of influence within the film industry, to gather some idea of how this historic lack of diversity is presented through discourse. This thesis sets out to explore, contrast, and indeed critique the ways that Hollywood discusses Blackness, Whiteness, and whether it demonstrates colourblind racism in the wake of the so-called 'post-racial' era following the presidency of Barack Obama. The key area of study for this thesis will be upon the critical reception of contemporary Hollywood films that have, both directly and inadvertently, found themselves to be influenced by America's racial discourse.

The role of the critic as a cultural mediator and gatekeeper between artists and audiences (DeBenedetti 2006) therefore becomes vitally important in the shaping of public opinion on films as cultural products- which then of course gives them an even further responsibility for shaping the subsequent racial discourse that arises from films that deal with racial representation. Warner (2017) argues that representation of people of colour in film has, as a result of the colourblind racism proposed by scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2011), reached 'plastic representation' in which the diversity of Hollywood films and representation of marginalized groups has become a tokenizing gesture undertaken by production companies and studios to avoid criticism. "Black representation, as it's been understood in a popular sense, has been dominated by the circulation of mediated imagery yielding deleterious effects for the groups depicted. The fear of the effects of such "poor" representation has resulted in a set of binary, nonscientific, underdeveloped metrics" (Warner 2017, pp. 5). These metrics are usually oversimplified to be 'positive and negative', which reflect the under-developed nature of inclusivity in Hollywood. The current state as well as a history of diversity within Hollywood that Yuen (2018) and others have explored will be a foundation on which this thesis builds a theoretical framework.

1.2 – Research Question

Relevant concepts that theorize race in the United States, race in film and the role of the critic will also form the basis of this thesis' theoretical framework. This thesis primarily aims to analyze a qualitative critical discourse analysis of the critical reception of a range of different contemporary Hollywood films that differ in levels of racial diversity. The variables and time-frame of these films and reviews will be further explored in the methodological chapter of this thesis, but as a precursory overview, this thesis will look at films made since the first '#OscarsSoWhite' controversy in 2015 that have featured the 'White-Saviour' trope, as well as films with all-black casts and directors, and films that contain elements of both. Overall, the aim for this research is to examine the manner in which critics may differently view these films, and whether racial ideology is a factor in their critique of films with differing levels of diversity. This leads to the research question:

How are Blackness and Whiteness constructed and discussed in criticism of Hollywood films since #OscarsSoWhite?

This question seeks to address the primary data here- the reviews themselves. The use of critical discourse analysis will be explored further later in this thesis, but the initial motivation for its use are to accurately identify any inherent political, racial or social bias in texts (Van Dijk 1993). Whilst this question focuses on the ways in which Blackness and Whiteness are discussed by critics, the background of the critics themselves is also highly significant. This assertion raises the subquestion:

How does the race of Hollywood film critics influence the way in which they discuss race in their reviews?

These questions offer specificity in terms of the time frame of the research undertaken here- which is the five years from 2015 – 2019 directly following the news cycle surrounding #OscarsSoWhite and the subsequent discourse from numerous angles about the lack of diversity being offered on screen in Hollywood.

Finally, a third sub-question focuses on the differences between the types of publications involved in the dataset. Omi and Winant (2015) have asserted that race is determined by socio-economic and political elements, an expectation might be that professional reviewers operating in the mainstream media might construct race differently than those working for more specific, niche media sources. So, another sub question here is:

Do mainstream critics construct race differently to critics writing for more specific and niche media sources, and if so, how?

These three questions set out a clear agenda for this thesis' empirical research, however what is also important is to identify the theoretical gap in the literature for this study.

1.3 – Scientific Relevance

Taking the societal relevance of this research into account, the structure of this thesis centres around an identification of the important concepts contained within the theoretical framework- *race in the United States, race in the film industry, the role of the critic*- which then forms the basis for the methodological strategy for the selection, collection and analysis of the data here. This data is made up of 42 film reviews from a wide range of different publications, and the variables for its selection shall be detailed further in the methodological section.

In terms of the gap in the literature for research such as this, there are two primary studies that this thesis sets out to develop and build upon. First, a recent study by Anderson & Grether (2017) on the discussion of race by critics of films with black protagonists highlighted a gap in the literature on race and film that this thesis sets out to address. “We cannot speak to how reviews of films with white protagonists discuss race, if at all. Future studies should explore how movie reviews integrate race into their reviews of these films in order to see if similar patterns exist. Such studies would provide interesting insight into how recent awareness to Hollywood’s lack of racial diversity is discussed by movie reviewers.” (Anderson & Grether 2017, p. 200) Here they present the need for research that contrasts the critical reception of films with black protagonists with those of white protagonists- which is a need that this thesis' approach builds upon, whilst presenting a slightly more nuanced methodological basis that takes into account a number of different variables for quantitative study. Secondly,

Hughey (2010, 2012) similarly has written extensively on the discussion of race by film critics, whilst primarily focusing on the phenomenon of the 'White Saviour' film and its implications for both colourblind racism in the United States and Whiteness. This thesis seeks to build upon Hughey's work by providing the aforementioned contrast, providing empirical work on the ways that critics construct race in the contemporary Hollywood media environment. Using these two sets of research as a basis, this thesis' theoretical framework brings together a number of different sociological concepts on race, which will be explored in more depth subsequently here.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 – Race in The United States

This thesis positions itself theoretically using these primary concepts- Blackness, Whiteness, colourblind

ideology and the role of the critic. Blackness and Whiteness- the former having received considerably more scholarly attention than the latter, for reasons to be explained in more depth here- are the two defining racial positions within this thesis, and the existing literature on both lays the foundations for the critical discourse analysis to be undertaken in this thesis' analysis of data. It is not the intention here to oppose these two concepts against each other, rather to develop a level of theoretical understanding on both concepts that will allow for discourse on America's, and more specifically Hollywood's, problem with race. Also significant to the analysis of Hollywood's contemporary racial discourse is the concept of colourblind racism. In relation to the suggestion of a 'post-racial' society, this concept goes some way as to identify the ways in which racism has evolved in America, and has significance when analyzing the hegemony of whiteness in Hollywood films.

2.1.1 – The Concept of Race

Before exploring the United States' complex and troubled racial discourse, it is important to gain socio-historical perspective on the origins of the concept of race. On a precursory level, race is classified as a concept “that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies. Although the concept of race appeals to biologically based human characteristics (phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process” (Winant 2000, p.172). Winant here suggests a difference between race and ethnicity, in that race finds itself constructed through an identification of difference in a socio-historical context. Thompson & Tyagi (1996) astutely frame the influence of racial discourse in saying “race is about *everything*- historical, political, personal- and race is about *nothing*- a construct, an invention that has changed dramatically over time and historical circumstance.” (p. 35). Frankenberg (1993) follows a social constructionist line of thought on race- that it is a predominantly socially constructed concept that continues to have significant effects on social realities. Overall, race as a concept seems to find itself distinguished from ethnicity in the sense that it does not depend solely on phenomenological, physical distinguishing factors, race is the perception of classification of these traits by others, as well as dominant groups. Having established this, it is necessary for this thesis' theoretical basis to explore both Blackness and Whiteness as parts of a dichotomy of historical racial discourse in the United States.

2.1.2 – Blackness & Double Consciousness

Blackness is a complex and multi-dimensional concept that grew particularly in America following the emancipation proclamation in 1862. W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the key theorists of Blackness, aiming to theorize the African American's position in society. The cruel legacy of slavery and Jim Crow laws has resulted

in an environment of systemic and structural racism in the United States that has largely lessened the value of the lives of African Americans. (Clayton 2018). It is unfortunately impossible to understand Blackness in the United States without understanding this legacy- and it gives essential context to the racial discourse that pervades all elements of American life. Black Identity in America finds its roots in African heritage and traditions. For African Americans, Identity is volatile and an intricately complex issue. Du Bois' (1903) concept of the 'double consciousness'- in which African Americans are born into a white-dominant society that imposes upon them a split personality as an American and a Black person- serves as a foundation for much of the scholarship on African American cultural identity and has a great deal of relevance even in the contemporary sense. He describes it as "this sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul with the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois 1903, p. 2). The concept of the duality of blackness spread further than just the United States, Dayal (1996) goes further to say that this duality is more positively constructed as the liminality of leaving, entering and destabilizing the border zones of cultures, as fracturings of the subject that resist falsely comforting identifications and reifications. The more negatively constructed value of doubleness puts a focus on the performativity of the individual whilst denying their sovereignty (Dayal 1996).

Whilst Du Bois' work has been subject to extensive debate and has influenced African-American studies, Itzigsohn & Brown (2015) argue for the contemporary relevance of Du Bois' work in the sociological context. They suggest that Double Consciousness is central to African-Americans making sense of the self in the contemporary identity-focused racialized world. They look at how Du Bois enacts his theory through his phenomenological analysis of the African-American experience, and conclude that his work still has sociological relevance today. In support of this, Winant (2009) places double consciousness at the centre of analysis of the racialized world, going further to place racialization and the social constructions it gives rise to as some of the central tenets of the modern world system. In the context of film, double-consciousness plays a highly relevant role for actors of colour who are often forced into stereotypes that Hollywood has historically constructed, perpetuating the marginalization of actors of colour. Taking this concept into account for this research, what impact does double-consciousness have on critics reviewing racialized content on-screen? And to go further, how does it influence the aesthetic and social judgements of African-American critics?

Modes of Blackness

Double consciousness is one of the most prominent conceptions of Blackness in the United States- however more contemporary scholars have sought to develop new interdisciplinary approaches to Blackness and African American Identity. McPherson and Shelby (2004) have developed a multi-dimensional approach to qualifying what African American identity presents itself as. These dimensions, or 'modes of Blackness' (McPherson & Shelby 2004, p.177) can be summarized in five ways. First, *Racial* - which most people take to be related to the somatic or genetic characteristics and continental origins of human groups. Hence the racial label "African

American" applies to Americans who satisfy certain physical criteria and are descended from inhabitants of Africa. *Ethnic* is based on presumption of a shared culture and of common biological descent. Paradigmatic form – members of African American ethnic community are expected to be committed to reproducing their distinctive culture and perhaps to maintaining the groups integrity by observing the norm of black endogamy. *National* – includes the ascriptive criteria of previous two dimensions but also emphasizes the territorial origins of the group or its culture. The relevant geographical region is usually viewed as an ancestral 'homeland' and a source of group pride. *Cultural* – social conceptions not tied to previous three, attitudes and conduct are significantly and self-consciously shaped by African American structures of meaning (linguistic patterns, aesthetic sensibility, religious traditions). *Political* – commitment to certain political values such as equal civil rights and group political empowerment and to particular strategies of resistance against oppression (organized public protest, group solidarity). – Disagreement among African Americans as to what an adoption of these values specifically entails, but some commitment to these values and strategies is widely accepted as necessary for the label 'black' in the political sense- though these norms generally fall short of requiring blacks to support specific social policies. These dimensions are significant as they illustrate the multiplicity of what it means to be black in America. The implications for the attribution of these modes to individuals is highly provocative, as questions can be raised about authenticity of individuals in relation to this collective social identity, and by extension varying 'degrees of blackness'. In relation to film, this concept becomes significant as it is framed through analysis of reviews by African-American critics, as it was intriguing to try and identify any of these modes in language when these critics were discussing racially orientated content or other African-Americans.

Contemporary Racial Climate

In order to contextualize African-American Identity in the contemporary sense, it is important to understand the current sociopolitical climate in the US with regards to racial discourse. Since the high profile death of Trayvon Martin in 2012, a number of other cases of racially motivated violence against African-Americans, particularly those committed by Police, have given rise to civil unrest in black communities which have essentially culminated in the origin of the Black Lives Matter movement. According to the movement's website, "The project is now a member-led global network of more than 40 chapters. Our members organize and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.

Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression." (www.blacklivesmatter.com). This movement represents the contemporary socio-political climate for many African-Americans to a certain extent. Although Black Lives Matter is by no means an unequivocally supported movement by the black community. Clayton (2018) has provided context to Black Lives Matter's social position with his comparative analysis of Black Lives

Matter and the Civil Rights Movement. He claims that Black Lives Matter has not framed its issues as inclusively as the Civil Rights Movement. According to Clayton, the civil rights movement should act as a framework for Black Lives Matter to emulate by framing the issue of police brutality as something that is universally unacceptable, expanding the movement's boundaries in a bold way. (Clayton 2018). The social significance of Black Lives Matter, particularly in relation to its influence on the shaping of African-American identity, cannot be understated. In relation to Hollywood and #OscarsSoWhite, the context of this contemporary racial climate in the US provides insight into the media landscape that critics are operating in when they review films with racially orientated content. Prominent exposure in popular culture- it formed a recent storyline in TV series *Law and Order*- further shows that Black Lives Matter has “pierced a big hole in the ideology of a post-racial America and exposed the deep and persistent patterns of racism in the United States” (Petersen-Smith, 2015, para. 43).

These theoretical conceptions of blackness find themselves represented through this thesis' empirical analysis in critics' construction of race, and the contemporary racial and political contexts for blackness provide further links to the research findings. Next, another important theoretical aspect to the dichotomy of the United States' racial discourse is a racial category and construction that has equal potency in its power structure- if not more- but has only begun being definitively explored by sociologists in the past thirty years- whiteness.

2.1.3 - *Whiteness & Colourblind Racism*

Whiteness studies burgeoned at the end of the 20th century, with scholars such as Ruth Frankenberg (1993), Richard Dyer (1997) and Toni Morrison (1992) all contributing seminal theory on the topic. “One challenge in the critical examination of whiteness is thus to hold onto the unreality of race while adhering to the recognition of its all-too-real effects.” (Frankenberg in Rasmussen et al 2001, p.73). Frankenberg emphasizes within her conception of whiteness that it is a racial category that has remained *unmarked* throughout the 20th century- in the sense that it is unacknowledged as a racial category with particular stereotypes and with the concept being deeply entangled with colonialism and the creation of 'the other'. Whiteness has gone unmarked throughout this time due to a homogeneity of historical interpretation that has not adequately identified whiteness in the sense that its origins and construction have not been acknowledged. In fact, Frankenberg suggests that the only occasion in which whiteness was recognized during this time period was to differentiate whites from a racialized 'other'. Whiteness has gained significantly more attention in academic circles in the early 21st century and has in recent years begun to become part of popular cultural and political discourse. It has been defined as an identity that is neither problematized nor particularized within discourses on race because it assumes a status of normalcy (Chaiison, 2004). Whiteness' power in the United States has been dominant since its independence and original establishment as a unified nation. Moore argues that “There is no possible way to develop a democratic and equal society when the White people who were writing and implementing the laws considered non- White people to be less than human. The hypocrisy of the Founding Fathers has passed on a social disease that will

never be eradicated in this society because the democratic principles were formed under a false premise.”
(Moore 2005 p.752)

Dyer summarized the influence that whiteness has upon hegemony in stating “The equation of being white with being human secures a position of power.” (Dyer 1997, p. 9). He goes further to suggest that whites find themselves represented everywhere in popular culture, politics, and art. It is because of this representation and the normalization of their position that what they see in their representations are not racialized whites but as people who are variously classed, gendered, sexualized and abled. Therefore, in external representations whites are not presented as a specific race but as the human race (Dyer 1997). Further, when discussing race in popular culture and in historical discourse, focus has been on any racial imagery other than that of white people. Yet race is not only attributable to people who are not white, nor is imagery of non-white people the only racial imagery. (Dyer 1997). This is an immensely powerful position to inhabit, as this universality of whiteness suggests a claim to speak for all of humanity- which is unreachable for raced peoples due to their social categorization (Dyer 1997). To put this into the contemporary context, the multiplicity of identities that are now inhabited by individuals is paired with the fragmentation of traditionalist conceptions of race, gender, class and sexuality seem to have had little impact upon the centrism of whiteness and white cultural, social and political agendas within western societies. This research aims to put whiteness in the contemporary context of the Hollywood film industry, and in particular the critics that populate it.

Colourblind Racism

Colourblind racism is a significant concept in relation to these areas of study as it represents a conscious or unconscious strategy by which the hegemony of whiteness in the United States is perpetuated. Whilst this ideology has existed from the late twentieth century, scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2011) argue that it gained more widespread prominence following the election of Barack Obama in 2009, the first black president of the United States. Following his election, the narrative of race relations in the US shifted in popular culture and the news media towards what was described by some as a 'post-racial' society. For a lot of white Americans, Obama was the first 'black' leader they felt comfortable supporting because he did not talk about racism; because he kept reminding them he is half-white; because he was so 'articulate' or in Biden's words- Obama was the first 'mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy' (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2011). This development in American culture has led to a problematic framing of racial discourse in the United States, of which colourblind ideology is the central tenet. Colour-blind ideology provides a rationale for the relatively lower socio-economic and political status of minorities as the product of market forces, and their alleged cultural deficiencies. This of course contrasts with Jim Crow laws which centred around the overt view of whites that minorities were biologically and morally inferior. (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2011).

The central frames of colourblind racism are abstract liberalism, cultural racism and minimization of racism.

Abstract Liberalism incorporates the tenets associated with political and economic liberalism in a de-contextualized manner. This consists of, for example, opposing equal opportunities in job and academic selection processes by making a claim towards race-neutrality, by applying the same principles that govern market dynamics. This is problematic as the labour market is in fact highly systematically segregated and discriminatory because of informal social networks. *Cultural Racism* involves making claims that socio-economic inequality is largely hinged on the laziness of ineptitude of minorities. This, problematically suggests that cultural practices are biologically fixed and intrinsic to minorities' cultures relative to whites. *Minimization of Racism* is a common function within colourblind racism, in which it is implied that racism has largely disappeared in western societies, and that any minority's claim of racism is them playing the 'race card'. (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2011). These frames are significant to the empirical work of this thesis, as they will form some of the primary frames that will be used in the coding process and data analysis of the film reviews selected in order to identify whether critics utilize these frames in their praise or criticism of films with diverse crews and casts. However, it is also important here to understand the role that race has within the film industry, both on the production side and in terms of representation. In the context of this thesis' primary line of questioning, do critics exhibit colourblind ideology when reviewing films with differing levels of on-screen and behind-the-camera diversity? How does this fit into the context of #OscarsSoWhite? This thesis' analysis aims to answer these questions.

2.2 – *Race in Film*

Taking into consideration the multiple-sides of the paradigm of racial discourse in the United States, this thesis sets out to apply this critical lens to the film industry, in particular the microcosm of Hollywood. There are a number of different ways that, in a contemporary sense, race is constructed and disputed by different forces in Hollywood- however here the focus is on colourblind racism in both the production of Hollywood films as well as the representation that follows their release.

2.2.1 – *Colourblind Production*

#OscarsSoWhite and the subsequent calls for greater diversity in Hollywood clearly provide a contextual basis for the analysis of the analysis of how critics observe this in their reviews. However it is also significant to look at the production-side, and what ideology has led to the environment that lead to the criticism. Yuen (2017) outlines that there are three primary reasons that those working within the industry cite in response to and in acknowledgement of the lack of developed roles for ethnic minorities in Hollywood, that all align with Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich's work on colourblind racism. The racial status quo is maintained in Hollywood by decision-makers and influential industry personnel through this use of colourblind racism, attributing the dominance of whiteness in the industry to cultural factors and individual merit. The function of colourblind ideology amongst these decision-makers can be outlined the three important ways, or rather there are three reasons that they cite

for Hollywood's lack of diversity. Firstly, decision makers in Hollywood productions *blame the talent pool* – that is, Hollywood blames actors of colour for a smaller talent pool relative to their white counterparts. This is problematic as it poses the assumption that there is an equal playing field, in which structural and systemic racism is ignored in the navigation of actors of colour through a job market and that the film industry operates in the same way as the free market. This concept of meritocracy and the ignorance to the difficulty that people of colour face in the job market is an essential component of colourblind racism. The second function is, as a decision maker to *blame what you know* – that is, white Hollywood writers naturalize racial bias based on their life experiences. Just as there are less actors of colour working in the film industry, there are even fewer writers. Decision makers for studios then naturalize the bias of the life experiences of the majority of white writers as the assumption is that 'you write what you know', which more often than not is not a social world full of racially diverse people. Finally, these decision makers *Blame the market* in their lack of diversity – that is, Hollywood naturalizes bias by deflecting it onto imagined audience preferences, which drive market dynamics. Yuen goes on to highlight the fact that the abstract liberalism (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2011) that is demonstrated in Hollywood industry personnel's attitudes towards diversity, as they 'blame the market' in claiming that appealing to different demographics, is actually a myth. She cites that films with ethnic minority and female leads have historically been highly profitable- with recent films such as *Wonder Woman* and *Black Panther* serving as further examples of this.

Blackness On-Screen

Guerrero (1993) gives context to the contemporary representations to African American Identity on screen through his analysis of the new-wave of black filmmakers in the 1990's that pushed a reconceptualization of this identity, picking up where the Blaxploitation films of the 1970's left off. The new wave of Black films in the 1990's was rooted in widespread discontent and disenfranchisement of the African American diaspora due to the inception of neoliberal political and economic policy. Whilst the Blaxploitation genre of the 70's ironically comprised itself of white directors telling black stories, the wave of cinema that Guerrero describes here centred black filmmakers aiming at black audiences- whilst also aiming for potential mainstream cross-over. This movement- spearheaded by directors such as Spike Lee, Charles Burnett and Bill Duke- was successful in many ways and laid the foundations for the contemporary triumphs of black-directed and orientated films such as *Get Out* and *Black Panther*, which unlike their 1990's predecessors have managed to establish themselves as mainstream commercial powerhouses. Guerrero poignantly asks “Is the new [1990's] black movie book a cyclic or periodic phenomenon trapped within the context of Hollywood economics? Will this new boom signal a real and permanent opening for blacks at all levels in the industry?” (Guerrero 1993, p 24). This breakthrough that African-Americans achieved in the 1990's is interesting to contrast with the current #OscarsSoWhite landscape. We have moved closer to a wider representation of African-Americans on-screen in Hollywood, changing the industry in a number of ways. This is one of the ideas that this research sets out to measure- how does an increase in the number of African-Americans in directing and acting roles effects the ways in which critics

discuss race in their reviews?

2.2.2 – Race & Representation

Whilst colourblind ideology is utilized as decision makers in the Hollywood contribute to its historic lack of diversity, the role that representation plays is also highly salient. In this sense, both whiteness and blackness are represented in different ways by Hollywood- the former in a largely unmarked way and the latter in a way that creates racial stereotypes that are difficult for people of colour to challenge in the film industry. Craven (2018) has written recently on the topic of visible and invisible whiteness in relation to the ways that they have dominated Hollywood narratives to varying degrees since D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *Birth Of A Nation*. “American white supremacy has profoundly shaped the evolution of the classical Hollywood narrative, ensuring its place at the heart of American cinema’s critical apparatus as well as in Hollywood studios.” (Craven 2018, p.1). Her research highly informs the areas of research that this thesis aims to explore through the examination of racial discourse in Hollywood film criticism. Unmarked whiteness finds itself manifested clearly through the classical Hollywood narrative, that has continually cast white characters as protagonists with no reference to a particular way they should present themselves or behave in relation to their race (Yuen 2017). This colourblind casting in Hollywood that Yuen has explored has direct reference to the invisibility of whiteness. Yuen's interviews with ethnic minority actors illustrate the way in which Hollywood 'others' these minorities by casting them as characters that play into racial stereotypes- for example a Latina actress being cast as a maid and being required to adopt a Latin-American accent. In contrast with this and in support of Craven's research, white actors that Yuen interviewed never encountered being asked to adopt characteristics that would make them 'more white'. This invisibility of whiteness in Hollywood is largely representative of its invisibility in the United States at large- and the relationship of these two realities shall be explored through this thesis' analysis of the construction of whiteness in film reviews.

Both Whiteness and Blackness are clearly represented Banjo & Jennings (2017) go on to state that scholarship on race within film and television has focused on marginalized groups and minorities because of this binary creation of 'the other', and that this represents a neocolonial attitude that is represented in the film industry. This issue finds itself clearly represented in the controversy surrounding the 'White-Saviour' film. This sub-genre is made up of a narrative that features 'The messianic white self [who] is the redeemer of the weak, the great leader who saves blacks from slavery or oppression, rescues people of colour from poverty or disease, or leads indigenous peoples in battle for their dignity and survival' (Vera & Gordon 2003, p 33). This trope in cinema has existed since the beginning of its history, and is representative of a false reality perpetuated by white liberals in a failure to accept responsibility for systemic racism. Hughey's (2010) work on the critical reception of White Saviour Films is influential in the shaping of this thesis' research. He finds that the select group of reviewers he includes in his study does seem to perpetuate the problematic racial stereotypes included in white-saviour films, presenting essentialist racial identities. However some reviews in the study make a concerted effort to correctly

categorize films that contain the white-saviour narrative- and further, to criticize the films as racially insensitive (Hughey 2010). Hughey goes on to conclude that a gap in the research on communities of reviewers and collective meaning-making might lie in the limited focus of the specific genre that he has chosen to analyze the reviews of- looking solely at the reviews of white-saviour films. This leads to the area of research for this thesis. To expand on the social impacts that colourblind racism has had upon post-Obama America, Warner (2017) has written about a new phenomenon in Television and Film- that of plastic representation. She identifies that increases have been made by Hollywood studios, TV networks and streaming services to increase diversity in their casting. However this increase in the representation of ethnic minorities is bittersweet to Warner, as she describes it as “Plastic representation [which] operates as a system that reifies blackness into an empirical system of “box checking.” It is a mode of representation that offers the feel of progress but that actually cedes more ground than it gains for audiences of color.” (Warner 2017 pp.10). The reason that this has a detrimental impact is that, whilst studios rush to increase diversity in Hollywood by writing characters for African Americans that are defined by the dichotomy of positive or negative representation, complex roles are still rarely written for these actors- with many of these 'plastic' roles falling victim to established stereotypes and Hollywood tropes. The multitude of these 'plastic' roles then are then provided with a mirage of depth by critics who then buy into this belief that real meaningful change in the film industry is enacted through the mere representation of minorities on screen despite the lack of complexity or authenticity that these roles may have relative to the cultures and groups that they represent. Warner's aim here is not to criticize the positive impacts that diverse racial and intersectional representation on-screen can have to marginalized groups. Her point is that she believes that this diversity needs to be emulated and expanded beyond the buzz-word, and that marginalized groups seeing themselves represented on-screen should develop into identifying and connecting with the characters as they should be written from the histories and collective experiences of those groups (Warner 2017).

2.3 The Role of the Critic

To explore the role of the critic as a part of this theoretical framework it is first useful to give a general overview of some of the tenets of cultural criticism and well as assessing the social role of critics in the culture industry before zooming in on film criticism in this context. Studies have shown that critics not only play a role in the shaping of audience reception of cultural products, but to a certain extent help to determine the commercial performance of these products, particularly in the context of the Hollywood film industry.

2.3.1 Cultural Mediators

Critics inhabit an intriguing position within the culture industry, one in which they play an integral role in the mediation between cultural production and the tastes of their audiences (Bourdieu 1984). Cameron (1995)

argued that art critics have four purposes: to advertise new pieces of art and convey information about existing pieces of art, build their reputation as a “critic” by spotting an artist’s work, assist audiences in how to consume a piece of art, and influence the “taste” of the consumers by cultivating preferences for some art and not others. Cultural critics provide artistic evaluations of works, suggesting subjective interpretations of the symbolism included intrinsic to artworks which in turn provides the audience with a contextual basis to work from in their own evaluation and discussion of works. Then, acting as cultural mediators between producer and audience (Debenetti 2006), critics hold a high level of influence in relation to the racial discourse surrounding cultural products. Debenetti also goes on to distinguish between two key elements of criticism- the critic as an independent influencer and criticism & promotion. Another distinction to be made when considering critics as producers themselves is between media critics and aestheticians. Media critics find themselves firmly rooted in the present, reporting on contemporary developments in the culture industries and having to meet tight deadlines for their publications. Aestheticians are typically academic and scholarly critics who draw most of their influences from history. However, the role of the critic is shifting due to the influence of audience-led platforms on the internet. Increasingly, Internet users thus seem to be moving away from institutional gatekeepers and experts and instead refer to information provided by other Internet users. This trend does not merely undermine the authority of these cultural mediators, but also appears to erode the entire underlying system in which institutionally embedded experts decide on the value and legitimacy of cultural artifacts in society (Verboord, 2013). 'Critics function as cultural intermediaries between artistic goods and their audiences not only because of their central role as cultural authorities who enact aesthetic standards but also because of their ability to transform those standards and contribute to elevating (or lowering) entire fields of cultural goods' (Kersten & Bielby 2012 p. 34). This further supports the assertion that critics act as mediators with symbolic authority in the culture industry. These views on the role of the cultural critic highlight their influence on both cultural producers and audiences, adopting a social position that holds power. It is also important here to zoom-in on the specific role of critics in the film industry, in order to provide a theoretical basis to explore the ways in which they construct and discuss race in the context of this thesis' primary research question.

2.3.2 Film Criticism

For this thesis a crucial concept to understand is the role of the film critic within the culture industry.

Critics' intermediary position between cultural producers within the film industry and their audiences puts them in the middle of symbolic and material relations that propel their position to one of huge influence in film, and the cultural industry in general (Debenetti 2006). The dynamic of this influence is one that is important to this research, as when collecting data a consideration must be given to the individual critics' role within the film industry. Film reviews come with a multitude of implications for the industry, but the two most prominent can be identified as such. Firstly, film reviews play an influential role in an audience's decision to see a film or not.

Taking into account the economic result of this, studies have shown the impact of critical reception on box office performance (Boatwright, Basuroy, and Kamakura 2007), showing that positive or negative reviews do indeed influence performance, albeit later in the film's distribution cycle rather than earlier as the assumption might be.

USC Annenberg's 2018 study on diversity and inclusion within film criticism uncovered some intriguing results for the context of this thesis' focus of research.

“A total of 59,751 *reviews* were penned across the 300 top movies from 2015, 2016, and 2017. A full 78.7% of the reviews were written by men and 21.3% were written by women. No meaningful difference was observed by year. Overall, this reflects a gender ratio of 3.7 male reviews to every 1 female review. Of those reviews written by critics with an ascertainable racial/ethnic identity, a full 83.2% were white and only 16.8% were underrepresented. These percentages did not deviate over time. The percentage of critics from diverse backgrounds is well below both U.S. Census (38.7%) and the movie-going audience in North America (45%). The ratio of white critics to underrepresented critics is 4.96 to 1” (Smith 2018, p. 4).

This report illustrates the clear lack of diversity amongst film critics- who indubitably play a vital role in the commercial success of Hollywood films. This thesis is therefore an opportunity to qualitatively explore the ways in which race and cultural identity is constructed by critics in their appraisal of a diverse range of mainstream films, giving some context as to why diversity continues to be a problematic issue for Hollywood. Furthermore, this report helps to frame the environment in which film critics operate, which this thesis will go on to argue has a profound and highly influential impact on the content of their reviews, particularly when it comes to their discussion of race. One thing that is worth pointing is the way in which the American Political landscape has shifted in recent years, moving from what many considered to be a 'post-racial' society to a media landscape that is confronted with racial divides due to a rise in populism built around nationalist sentiments, along with crises both economic (financial crisis) and social (refugee crisis) and a disillusionment with what is perceived to be a corrupt elite (Rooduijn 2018). Racially motivated violence has been the subject of intense civil unrest, and the controversy surrounding the Trump presidency has generated societal friction which has seen itself manifested through the Black Lives Matter movement and its reactionary opposition, along with sombre, fatal events such as the clashing of Klu Klux Klan members and AntiFa activists in Charlottesville. Therefore, research examining the influence that these turbulent times has had on film criticism is societally relevant. Finally, to put this in the context of film reviewers, “whether they ignore or directly discuss race, they help to reconstruct race for society.” (Anderson & Grether 2017, p.191). If they discuss race in the contexts of the films they review, passing stereotypical representations off as accurate representations of the contemporary social world, they may reinforce essentialist understandings of race. So, their discourse surrounding race can help to perpetuate and maintain structural racial inequality by creating symbolic boundaries between dominant and subordinate groups (Anderson & Grether, 2017, Schwalbe et al. 2000).

All of these concepts inter-link and provide a sound theoretical basis for the empirical research of this thesis.

Before conducting this research, a clear and considered research design and set of methods was essential to identify, moving towards analyzing these concepts in practice. So, a few key questions arise following the establishment of this theoretical framework that include: is colourblind racism identifiable in these reviews? Do the critics use different language when discussing films with different levels of diversity?

3 - Methods & Data

3.1 - Introduction

This thesis aims to use a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of a range of different online reviews in order to discover how each text is positioned, whose interests are served and whose nullified by this positioning, the social and political consequences of this positioning- all in relation to social power structures. In this case these power structures are centred around the spectrum of racial discourse in the United States. The critical reception (online reviews) of a range of films that have received mainstream media attention and award nominations in Hollywood since 2015 will serve as the source of data for this critical discourse analysis. The significance of the

timeframe involved- 2015 to 2019- is that these films have all been made following the #OscarsSoWhite controversy of the 2015 Academy Awards, which sparked an outcry in the mainstream media and amongst political and social commentators in the US and further afield- suggesting that it was reflective of the lack of cultural diversity in the United States' widest reaching and economically lucrative cultural industry, film. Furthermore, the contextual frame of #OscarsSoWhite, also coincides with an exponential increase in prominent examples of civil unrest entangled within the US's historical racial discourse- including racially motivated violence in Baltimore, Ferguson and Charlottesville. Politically, this time period is also highly contentious and significant with the drastic change in policy and attitudes moving from the Obama presidency into the Trump administration, making the environment in which the culture industry is discussed aligned with this political discourse.

3.2 - Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA was chosen because as a process it reveals the discourses texts carry and the power relations they support as a motivated choice of language (Fairclough, 1992). Viewing discourse as a knowledge about the world disseminated by groups to support their own interest (Foucault, 1972). CDA requires the researcher to not only look at the content of the text, but how its meaning was constructed linguistically. In this sense, a deeper analysis of how race is constructed by these film critics is the goal of this research, along with the societal implications for these constructions of race.

The application of Fairclough's approach to CDA follows a comprehensive regime of textual interpretation. This approach deals with the text on three levels- firstly to take the text on a linguistic level, analyzing the ways in which language asserts power and holds political bias. Secondly, on the level of interpretation, where the initial analysis is processed and transfigured relative to the analyst's own socio-political positionality. Third the analysis is put in a sociohistorical context and related to other texts in order to place it. On the textual level, we will examine the use of key words and phrases as well as the construction of key sentences in the texts in order to discern and interpret the signs that the authors have set down to convey certain meanings, focusing particularly on those which signal the critics' judgements. Critical discourse analysis requires the analyst to take a sociopolitical stance, contrary to other discourse analyses. It is required for the researcher to spell out their research aims and point of view and perspective on their own socio-political position. Here it is therefore necessary that I acknowledge that, as a White-male from the United Kingdom, my own perspective inherently contains a certain amount of inherent bias and subjectivity when discussing race. Critical discourse analysis is an ultimately political form of research, that intends to cover new ground and confront inequities in social worlds through the study of language and socially related works (van Dijk 1993).

Whilst adopting CDA for my research I also acknowledge that, in terms of pragmatics, it is relatively open-ended in terms of methodological process, with no one 'right' way to conduct it. Therefore adaptations that I have made in my own use of CDA for this research follow on from Fairclough's multi-tiered approach. The processes

associated with the levels of analysis previously mentioned are- the object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts); the processes by means of which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects; and the socio-historical conditions which govern these processes. What is particularly beneficial about Fairclough's approach to CDA is the fact that there are multiple points of entry for analysis, and it does not require any one specific frame to apply to a text, as long as the researcher includes all of the frames and they are shown to be mutually explanatory. The connections between each text and form of analysis through an examination of the intertextuality of the texts highlights intriguing patterns and discordant themes that require explanation, description and interpretation.

To put this into pragmatic terms, this CDA will follow Fairclough's framework of three stages. Firstly the film reviews will be coded in a first preliminary round to discern what linguistic features each reviewer uses to positively or negatively create meaning in their judgement of the film and its content. After doing so, applying the frames described later in this section to analyze this language and discern its relationship to constructions of race will lead into the next round of coding that will, according to Fairclough's framework, focus on the interpretation of the use of this language and make connections between themes that arise from the data. Finally, the third stage of analysis will require placing these relationships in a socio-historical context and employing intertextuality to compare the results gathered from these texts with one another to see if there are thematic similarities in the ways in which each review refers to race.

The difference between my research and other critical discourse analyses is the way in which I have also used grounded coding, including open and axial in the first two rounds of coding, to be able to draw meaning from the texts themselves and allowing the research to flow in a natural way depending on the findings (Charmaz 2006). Whilst the incorporation of a grounded method may be a slight break from Fairclough and van Dijk's methods of critical discourse analysis, the incorporation of this grounded coding method alongside the use of a socio-political lens of CDA has produced some highly relevant and interesting results. Having laid out the methodological framework for this thesis' empirical work, the data-set itself is another highly salient area for discussion, as it is clear that the choice of content for this data set will have an essential influence on the end results.

3.3 - Choice of Data

For the choice of films that will make up the data-set of reviews, maximum variation sampling is used here. A range of different films will be the source of analysis- following different variables with each film representing a different position on a spectrum of diversity- the choices of which can be seen in Table 1.

Title & Date	Director	<i>Ethnicity Of Director</i>	<i>Ethnicity Of Cast</i>	<i>Racially Orientated Narrative?</i>	<i>Production & Distribution Type</i>	<i>'White Saviour' narrative?</i>	<i>Genre</i>
Three	Martin	White	White	No	Independent	No	Drama

Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017)	McDonagh	British (Male)	Protagonist & Supporting roles		(Fox Searchlight)		
Green Book (2019)	Peter Farrelly	White American (Male)	White Protagonist, Black Supporting role	Yes	Major (Universal)	Yes ('Tony Lip' character)	Historical Drama / Comedy
Hidden Figures (2016)	Theodore Melfi	White American (Male)	Black Protagonists, Mixed cast	Yes	Major (20 th Century Fox)	Yes ('Al Harrison' character)	Historical Drama
Detroit (2017)	Kathryn Bigelow	White American (Female)	Black Protagonists, Mixed Cast	Yes	Independent (Annapurna)	No	Historical Action
A Wrinkle In Time (2018)	Ava DuVernay	African American (Female)	Black Protagonist, Mixed Cast	No	Major (Disney)	No	Fantasy / Adventure
Get Out (2017)	Jordan Peele	African American (Male)	Black Protagonist, white supporting roles	Yes	Major (Universal)	No	Horror
Moonlight (2016)	Barry Jenkins	African American (Male)	Black Protagonist, black supporting roles	No	Independent (A24)	No	Drama

Table 1: Film Choices & Criteria – Source: www.imdb.com

The sub-categories and variables included in this table present justification for the choice of each title here. Firstly, with this thesis' theoretical focus on the social construction of both Blackness and Whiteness, the race of the director was an important discerning factor in the selection of each title. Here I have tried to include an even number of black and white directors, in order to give relative parity within the dataset and to be able to adequately compare the reception of films that are similar in genre, content, and distribution to be able to discern differences in the ways critics discuss films made by black directors and white directors. The race of the cast was another important consideration when selecting these cases. With the exception of *Moonlight* (2016) which had a cast comprised entirely of African American actors, all of these films had a mix of white and black characters, which was largely due to my desire to include a majority of films that had explicitly racially oriented narrative content- with some examples of historical period dramas that focus on significant points in America's racial discourse such as the civil rights movement (*Green Book*, *Detroit*, *Hidden Figures*). A distinction to be made here between films that do contain this narrative content and those that do not is in relation to genres and sub-genres found on www.imdb.com that will be discussed in further length shortly. The reason for this is that these films, with their explicit racial content, centre racial discourse as part of the critics' analysis which allows me to analyze, in turn, how they construct race within their reviews. Within these film choices it was relevant to include films made by women, because as Kimberlee Crenshaw points out in her work on Intersectionality, it is impossible to truly analyze racial inequality without also analyzing gender inequality. Whilst this was a

methodological consideration to give a diverse set of results, Intersectionality was not, however one of the key areas of study for this thesis. So, whilst the focus of this research may be race, it is interesting to look at the ways in which critics appraise films made by white women in comparison with films made by black women- to see if there are any general disparities in the ways their films are discussed and appraised positively or negative in comparison to those directed by men. Although, over this time period it must be noted that there were significantly less films made by female directors than men- an analysis of which has been worthy of its own research. Even more telling was the shortage of films made and released by African American women in this time period, of which Ava DuVernay's *A Wrinkle In Time* is the first where an African American woman has made a film with a production budget of over \$100 million (Keegan 2016). It is also worth noting that DuVernay is the *only* African American woman ever nominated for the Best Director award at the Oscars.

In terms of the production and distribution of these films, I have selected a mix of both widely distributed major-studio production films and smaller independently produced- the distinction between which is admittedly ever-blurring in Hollywood due to major studios developing branches of their conglomerates focused on an independent cinematic aesthetic. To draw a distinction between the two; “Where studio films are very expensive, independent films are made on relatively low budgets; where studio films are in the business of “entertainment,” independent films often set out to challenge their viewers with relatively difficult subject matter or techniques or both; where Hollywood films generally eschew taking sides on political issues, independent films are often explicitly political and critical” (Ortner 2012, p. 2). Analyzing the reviews of both mainstream and independent films allows for some intriguing insight into the ways in which these two differing styles and aesthetics are reviewed, particularly in the context of race with independent films perhaps being more directly political and provocative.

Genre was another, albeit slightly less significant, area for consideration for the selection of these films. In order to follow the maximum variation sampling method, as wide a range of films as possible was necessary to gather a set of results that can be compared and contrasted. Here, including a mix of dramas, horror, action, fantasy and comedy means that a wide range of reviews that differ in the ways that they approach the narrative content of each film could be accessed- rather than focusing on one genre that might produce an over-saturated data-set. Genre also allowed for distinction between films that had racially orientated narrative content and those that did not. Here, IMDb was also accessed to look at a synopsis of each film, discerning that the films that do have racially orientated narratives all have some element of racial discrimination within the synopsis, whether that be historical dramas focused on the civil-rights-movement-era (*Hidden Figures*, *Green Book*, *Detroit*) or satirical films set in the present day (*Get Out*).

The final criteria for selection was whether they could be classified in terms of narrative as 'White Saviour Films'. The White Saviour is a narrative trope that has existed in Hollywood since the early years of the film industry, and was bolstered in particular in the 1980's. “A 'White Savior' movie is a movie where the story is about a white character stepping in to help a person or people of color from their struggles. While a lot of these stories are period pieces used to talk about racism, some of them are contemporary stories meant to be about

deeper understanding, but actually, enforce whiteness as a sort of "Messiah" to a class considered to be an "Other." (Hellerman 2019, <https://nofilmschool.com/white-savior-trope-in-movies>) These movies- in their portrayal of racial discrimination, conflict and marginalization through the perspective of a white protagonist- are particularly representative the hegemony of whiteness in Hollywood, and the analysis of the reception of these films is critical to understanding how this hegemony is either perpetuated or challenged by critics. Comparison of the reception of these films with other films with racial narrative content- particularly those made by African American directors- will be an intriguing element to this research.

Reviews

The data itself will be the critical reception of these films from online publications ranging from general news sites and newspapers to specifically themed blogs with intended audience demographics based on race or gender. Prince (1997) has defined two primary categories of articles that are identified as film criticism. The first of these is 'mainstream'- the main purpose of which is more generally to offer the reader a summary of the plot, some information on the cast and production team, and an overall judgement as to whether the film is good or bad- influencing the reader's decision whether to view the film (Hughey 2010). The second type of review is identified by Prince as 'journal-based criticism', which is generally a longer form, with a more in-depth aesthetic, sociopolitical analysis that is targeted at a specific audience (Prince 1997). Making the distinction between these two types of articles is an important component to this thesis' analysis, as it provides variables to work with when selecting the dataset. A combination of both mainstream reviews and journal-based will be used for each film, helping to produce a balance between popular and more critical perspectives from the reviewers. Therefore with this dataset I have aimed to analyze an even split of mainstream and journal-based sources which can be seen below in Table 2.

Mainstream	Specialist Magazines / Blogs	African American Publications
Variety	The New Yorker	BlackPressUSA
The Hollywood Reporter	Little White Lies	The Root
The Washington Post	Sight & Sound	Ebony
The Los Angeles Times	Indiewire	Shadow & Act
The Guardian	Roger Ebert	
Empire	One Guy's Opinion	
Rolling Stone	Slant Magazine	
The Atlantic	The Ringer	
Mail Online	The Onion A.V. Club	
Vox	NPR	

Table 2: Publication Choices & Categories

I was able to access reviews by critics in all of these publications for the film titles mentioned above. Something that became apparent in the collection of this data, prior to its analysis, was highlighted to me when examining the social demographic of these critics. With a few exceptions in the case of a few of the specifically-targeted reviews (in terms of race and gender), the majority of critics were white males. This then presented a significant consideration for this dataset which is supported by USC Annenberg's 2018 study on the diversity of American film critics, assessing reviews of the top 100 rated films on Rotten Tomatoes from 2015-2017 based on ethnicity and gender. The report illustrates the clear lack of diversity amongst film critics- who indubitably play a vital role in the commercial success of Hollywood films. This thesis is therefore an opportunity to qualitatively explore the ways in which race and cultural identity is constructed by critics in their appraisal of a diverse range of mainstream films, giving some context as to why diversity continues to be a problematic issue for Hollywood. This inequality makes a Critical Discourse Analysis of the texts that these critics produce- particularly those in which the ethnicity and/or gender of the critic differs to the director and stars of the film in question- the most suitable methodological strategy.

As can be seen from appendix 6.1, there were nineteen reviews from specific sources, as well as twenty-three from mainstream sources. The asterisks denote where an African-American critic is writing for a mainstream source, of which there were three such instances. This table also gives some characteristics of the word counts, with the mean average at 1,026 words.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

For the collection of these film reviews the Movie Review Query Engine (www.mrqe.com) was used. This site (at the time of writing) has links to 1,134,647 reviews for 126,956 different film titles, making it an expansive database for film reviews. The reason for the choice of this platform over its larger counterparts *Rotten Tomatoes* and *Metacritic* is due to its functionality primarily as a database rather than a review site in and of itself. The other two sites mentioned, whilst they boast a large amount of reviews both English-language and international, have more of a focus on ranking films based on average scores, which are often calculated by the sites' staff and based on their interpretations of reviews. With the focus of this critical discourse analysis being primarily on the racial subtexts within each review rather than their appraisal of whether the reviewer deems the film to be good or bad, the two sites mentioned seemed to provide unhelpful platforms. Similarly, *Rotten Tomatoes'* hierarchy for reviewers seemed to present bias with critics being able to propel their content to the foreground of the site by applying for 'top-critic' status also provided a level of bias in this case that the Movie Review Query Engine does not.

3.5 Operationalization

Following Fairclough's (1995) previously mentioned approach to critical discourse analysis, the practical phases in which each text will be analyzed can be split into three. Firstly, the use of specific key words and phrases relating to the three key frames identified in the theoretical section of this thesis– Whiteness, colourblind ideology and Blackness- will be examined with the aim of interpreting and identifying the signifiers and signs that each critic has used to generate meaning. The use of language with positive and negative connotations in relation to the content of the films, their actors' performances and the creative choices of the director will be analyzed through these frames to discern the relationship between these aesthetic judgements and the social construction of race in these contexts.

3.6 Frames for Analysis

Following on from the identification of the defining concepts of this thesis in the earlier theoretical section, the key frames of analysis in the coding of these reviews are Racial Colourblindness, Blackness and the reification of Whiteness. In viewing the reviews of these films that have content relating to the US' racial discourse both implicitly (through the ethnicity and gender of the director and cast) and explicitly (through the narrative themes in each film's content). Within the first frame, concepts included in this thesis' theoretical section such as Warner's (2017) plastic representation and Bonilla-Silva's (2003) colourblind racism were operationalized within the coding and data analysis, attempting to highlight the use of these devices in the criticism.

Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich (2011) outline three central frames of colourblind racism as previously described in this thesis' theoretical framework. These are (1.1) *abstract liberalism*, (1.2) *cultural racism* and (1.3) *minimization of racism*. (1.1) is the most common frame for colourblind racism as it incorporates decontextualized usage of the ideas of political and economic liberalism in a social, racial context- making claims towards race-neutrality by stating that people should be treated in the same way as market commodities. (1.2) Attributes biological factors to social inequality, stating that minorities cultural practices are fixed and that inequality is due to learnt behaviours of laziness or inappropriate values. (1.3) Is the general claim that widespread discrimination has all but come to an end and minorities claims to this discrimination are them 'playing the race card'. These theories served as a solid theoretical reference point to be able to apply to frames that were identified through the coding of the texts. These eight frames all in some way or another relate back to colourblind racism and plastic representation- they can be outlined as: *Markers of Blackness*, *Markers of Whiteness*, *Critical Attitudes to White Saviour*, *Influence of Personal Experience*, *Hollywood's Lack of Diversity*, *Contemporary Racial Context*, *Positive and Negative Markers*. These frames all linked to the ways in which critics gave their aesthetic appraisal of films, related the films to other contexts and, most importantly, how they constructed and discussed race within the reviews. There are also larger themes that a few of these frames cluster together to form.

3.7 Data Set & Coding

The collection of data for this research yielded 42 different movie reviews in total, six for each of the seven films that have been previously outlined, from an even number of both mainstream and specific sources. The mainstream sources included online versions of newspapers, popular news websites, and high-traffic film magazines and highly popular movie review sites. In the case of the specific sources, a distinction was made to include at least one review from an African-American publication- in order to give a balanced set of results in relation to the ways that race was discussed in these reviews. It must be noted that, correlating with USC Annenberg's (2018) inclusion study on the diversity of film critics, there were significantly less film reviews available from African-American critics than from their White counterparts. However, despite this racial imbalance within this community it was important that critics from the two racial groups this thesis sets out to analyze are represented in this data, and in turn this has led to some intriguing results in relation to the differing ways that critics from these groups write about race.

This Critical Discourse Analysis initially required coding of all of the reviews in question. This was operationalized through the use of the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti, which serves as a highly effective platform for the kind of linguistic analysis that this critical discourse analysis requires.

As detailed in the methodological chapter of this thesis, the primary frames that were used as the foundations for this critical discourse analysis were associated with colourblind racism, in an attempt to sufficiently answer the main research question about whether existing racial ideology is maintained through film criticism. The first stage of analysis was an initial open coding of all of the 42 reviews using a grounded method in which any significant themes that arose from the reading and coding of the texts were identified in an attempt to allow the texts to create their own meaning whilst drawing my own as a subjective researcher. Therefore, as Fairclough (1995) outlines in his approach to critical discourse analysis, a subjective socio-political stance- that Hollywood has had a historical problem with diversity due to a cultural hegemony of Whiteness in the United States- was necessary for me to adopt to deepen my understanding of how this may or may not be enacted through film criticism.

4. Results & Analysis

The operationalization of Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis yielded a number of intriguing results that go some way to illustrate the ways in which Blackness, Whiteness and Colourblind Ideology have been used by Hollywood critics in their reviews of films made from 2015 – 2019. Open coding was first employed to start to analyze the ways in which critics discussed race, along with general criticism that would form later categories. Following this initial coding and, in line with Fairclough, a second stage of analysis was operationalized which led to a categorization of these initial codes into code groups. With no shortage of insightful quotes in every text, over 280 codes were initially identified. This analysis will be initially split into the code groups that were identified, linking theory back to the research question of this thesis. The table below

gives a general overview of the frames identified and the frequency that they were used in reviews of each film. Numbers represent both the amount of times that a code that fits into one of the code groups was used, and the totals of codes used in each set of reviews. A key aspect to this table is that a number of frames have been clustered together. This is because it became clear from the analysis that a number of codes inter-link depending on context. The frames that have linking codes are shaded in the same colour in table 1.

Film Titles:	<i>Moonlight</i>	<i>Get Out</i>	<i>A Wrinkle In Time</i>	<i>Detroit</i>	<i>Hidden Figures</i>	<i>Green Book</i>	<i>Three Billboards</i>
Frames:							
- <i>Markers of Whiteness</i>	3	6	8	12	9	11	13
- <i>Critical Attitudes to White Saviour</i>	0	0	0	1	7	9	0
- <i>Markers Of Blackness</i>	13	8	5	6	4	5	2
- <i>Influence of Personal Experience</i>	5	6	6	5	3	5	3
- <i>Hollywood's Lack of Diversity</i>	7	6	10	2	5	6	0
- <i>Contemporary Racial Context</i>	7	8	4	7	3	4	0
- <i>Positive Markers</i>	12	8	3	6	7	5	13
- <i>Negative Markers</i>	0	3	7	9	4	8	3
total	47	45	43	48	42	53	34

Table 3: Frequency of Frames in Each Film's Reviews

4.1 Markers of Blackness

One of the clearest frames that emerged from coding of these reviews was the way in which markers of blackness were used by critics in a number of different contexts.

The first thematic inconsistency and overarching idea from this data arose from the analysis of reviews for *Moonlight* and *Three Billboards*. The distinction between these two films in the way that racial ideology is constructed by reviewers is stark, quite predictably due to that fact that *Moonlight* has an African-American director- Barry Jenkins- and an all-black cast, whilst *Three Billboards* is conversely made by a White director- Martin McDonagh- and features a predominantly all-white cast, with the exception of a small supporting role for African-American actor Clarke Peters and a small amount of African-American extras, the significance of which shall be discussed further later. This distinction between these films, and due to the fact that neither of them

feature a narrative that is explicitly racially themed, make them ideal cases to contrast with respect to theory surrounding Blackness and Whiteness as concepts, markers of which can be identified in the reviews of both films.

Firstly, regarding *Moonlight*, all critics were eager to identify the significance of the themes of African-American identity within the narrative. In fact, particularly in the case of the mainstream critics, Blackness seemed to resonate as the primary discussion point within these reviews, which can be illustrated within the first line of critic Peter Debruge's review for *Variety*:

What does it mean to be Black in America today? That question, too big for any one film to answer, serves as the driving inquiry in Barry Jenkins' "*Moonlight*" a beautifully intimate character study that argues in no uncertain terms that the African-American identity is far too complex to be reduced to the flimsy stereotypes so often presented on-screen. (Debruge 2016, paragraph 1)

Here Debruge makes a forthright claim to the categorization of the film as one that is about Blackness before anything else. This use of racial markers unhelpfully also seems to push the film into a sub-category in which it is defined by the race of its protagonist and director rather than its narrative content. Whilst Debruge makes this claim, he attributes a positive marker- 'beautifully intimate'- and also decries the 'flimsy stereotypes' that Hollywood has previously created. His acknowledgement of this, also with his claim that Blackness is a concept too big for 'any one film to answer', show his level of awareness of the problematic nature of Hollywood's historical relationship with race, as well as his desire as a critic to valorize a film in which racial stereotypes are challenged. Todd McCarthy (White) of *The Hollywood Reporter*, another mainstream source, is also quick to attach racial markers to *Moonlight* in his opening line:

"A haunting reflection on African-American masculinity, writer-director Barry Jenkins' intimate character study traces the life of a black gay man from his troubled Miami childhood to maturity." (McCarthy 2016, paragraph 1)

Here the critic is giving what transpires to be a highly positive appraisal of the film on both a technical and societal level, but the race of the cast and director are foregrounded in a way that almost seems to fit the film into a category or sub-genre, rather than making the film's aesthetic merit the focus.

These mainstream reviews contrast with others in the data-set that provide slightly more nuanced appraisals of the film and its societal context. Brian Tallerico (White), regular critic for *RogerEbert.com* the popular film review site is an example of this in his opening paragraph:

"Who is you, man?" Dramatic film has long been fascinated with issues of identity, but they've rarely been explored with the degree of eloquence and heartbreaking beauty as in Barry Jenkins' masterful "*Moonlight*," one of the essential American films of 2016. "*Moonlight*" is a film that is both lyrical and deeply grounded in its character work, a balancing act that's breathtaking to behold. It is one of those rare pieces of filmmaking that stays

completely focused on its characters while also feeling like it's dealing with universal themes about identity, sexuality, family, and, most of all, masculinity." (Tallerico 2016)

Whilst it would be misleading to suggest that Tallerico doesn't mention race within his review, his framing in this quote is indicative of an approach that he and New Yorker critic Richard Brody both adopt, in that they focus more on the universally relatable themes of the film in their praise, as well as praising it for its artistic merit and evocative nature. In turn, there are very few markers of Blackness in their reviews in comparison with the mainstream critics. So, clearly here there is a difference in the way that more niche specific-audience film reviews approach Blackness here from their mainstream counterparts in the context of *Moonlight*. However, what is more thought provoking is the way in which the African-American critic- Drew-Shane Daniels has written about *Moonlight* in comparison with these White reviewers. The language used in this review also helps to identify another theme within this analysis- influence of personal experience- which is intriguingly one of the key frames that Anderson & Grether's (2017) study on . However in this context, Daniels uses highly personal language, even positioning himself as part of the audience rather than an intermediary as critics typically tend to do in their reviews.

"When it comes to films about sexuality, Black gay men have had our share of low budget movies with mediocre acting and stereotypical storylines. It's rare these days to see anything authentic come across the big screen, let alone something tackling sexuality and gender norms. That's why when I saw the trailer of *Moonlight* I didn't have high expectations.

However, after seeing the movie during a sneak preview with the creator and cast, I can now confirm: *Moonlight* is a groundbreaking film. Through the work of writer-director Barry Jenkins, *Moonlight* offers a much-needed nod to the depictions of same-sex desire, identity and masculinity." (Daniels, 2016 paragraphs 1-2)

Here Daniels uses racial markers along with highlighting the intersectionality of the film's protagonist, but in a very different context to the other reviewers. Whereas the mainstream critics identify the perceived salience of Blackness to the film's narrative and societal context, they do so from a distanced perspective, to some extent creating an 'otherness' of this racial group, Daniels handles this differently. Perhaps due to the fact that he is writing for a magazine with a predominantly African-American readership, Daniels is able to write from a relatable perspective. This has some interesting implications, firstly in relation to something else that he mentions- authenticity. In this instance Daniels is able to bring a level of authenticity to his subjective perspective on the marginalization of homosexual African-American males in Hollywood, whilst also confirming to the audience the lack of narratives that have represented this social group and that this film does exactly that.

These examples of the Markers of Blackness within the reviews provides a good analytical basis for comparison with the way in which critics conversely construct Whiteness within their reviews- this comparison will of

course lead to some critical indication of the politics of difference amongst critics.

4.2 *Marked/ Unmarked Whiteness*

What has become particularly apparent through the analysis of these film reviews is the linguistic perspective of Whiteness in relation to the way in which White reviewers use considerably fewer- and in some cases, none at all- racial markers to describe the race of White actors and directors. The link to the theory here is, first and foremost, related to unmarked Whiteness. As previously discussed, this can be summarized as the way in which Whites, knowingly and unknowingly, assume a dominant role within society by enjoying status claimed by default and hence are left “unmarked” as opposed to nonwhites (Brekhuis, 1998). The impact that this has is that this functions to make whiteness the dominant ethnicity in a symbolic sense, whilst hiding it simultaneously, with members of this racial group being oblivious to the societal implications of being unmarked (Doane, 1997). In the context of these reviews, Whiteness remains unmarked in reviews by white critics when discussing white actors and directors. Intriguingly, the only times that whiteness *is marked* is in reviews by African-American critics, which will be discussed in detail here. But, firstly to contrast with the previous frame, Brian Tallerico's review for RogerEbert.com offers a good example of the way that race is unmarked when it comes to White actors and Directors:

“One day, she sees three barren billboards on a rarely-traveled road, and she rents the space to ask the local chief of police, played by Woody Harrelson, why there are no answers. Local media becomes interested in the billboards, and the attention sparks a series of events involving not only the chief but one of his more loathsome officers, played by Sam Rockwell. Peter Dinklage, Caleb Landry Jones, Abbie Cornish, Lucas Hedges, Clarke Peters, and John Hawkes fill out a ridiculously perfect supporting cast.”
(Tallerico 2017, paragraph 2)

Here it is clear that racial markers are not used at all when discussing the characters and actors that make up the cast. Whilst this might seem unremarkable and suggests that the critic doesn't discuss the race of the characters because it is not significant to the narrative or technical appraisal of the film, it is in comparison with the way that Blackness is constructed in other reviews that gives perspective here. It is the fact that the White critic does not discuss race when reviewing a film with a predominantly white cast, but in the case of *Moonlight*- where the race of the cast is just as insignificant to the narrative as *Three Billboards*, if not less- critics immediately praise the story for the theme of Blackness in its narrative and for the way it addresses the question 'What does it mean to be Black in America today?' This exemplifies the function of whiteness, as reviews are then implicitly created from a white perspective that ignores the tenets of the White race whilst 'othering' Blackness. Whilst white-male critics can hardly be blamed from writing from a white-male perspective, the amount of reviews that

demonstrate unmarked whiteness highlights the lack of diversity amongst Hollywood film critics who undeniably play a role as cultural mediators that influence box-office performance of films. The reification of this Whiteness then plays into the hands of the colourblind racism demonstrated by decision-makers for Hollywood Studios, as they in turn falsely claim that lack of historical on-screen diversity has been due to market forces dictating that films with minority leads are less marketable (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2003, Yuen 2018). However of course recent years have seen mainstream Hollywood films with minority leads disprove this assumption (Yuen 2018).

On the contrary, African-American reviewers mention Whiteness in a number of different contexts, as well as Blackness. This provides a balance in Hollywood criticism that for the most part is lacking. A good example of this is Angelica Jade Bastien's scathing review of *Detroit*, in which she criticizes the film's white perspective on highly evocative racial violence:

“It wasn’t the relentless violence inflicted upon black bodies or the fiery devastation of the riots ripping apart Detroit but the emptiness behind these moments that got under my skin. Watching “Detroit” I realized that I’m not interested in white perceptions of black pain. White filmmakers, of course, have every right to make stories that highlight the real and imagined histories of racism and police brutality that pointedly affect Black America. There are, of course, a litany of films by white filmmakers about subject matter unique to the black experience that I find moving—“The Color Purple” comes to mind.” (Bastien 2017, paragraph 2).

Here, in her criticism Bastien explicitly states that it was the director's misunderstanding of structural and historical racism that African-Americans have faced that made her review this film negatively. In this case she attributed the director's whiteness to this misunderstanding and inappropriate perception of 'black pain'.

4.3 Critical Attitudes to the 'White Saviour'

The two films in this data-set that can be defined at least to some degree as 'White Saviour' films- in which a white character plays a role in a film that usually has a racially orientated narrative, and uses their white privilege to save a minority character from racial discrimination or violence - provide a range of interesting sociological implications. This is made evident in the differing attitudes towards the two 'White Saviour' films in question here- *Hidden Figures* and *Green Book*. Another feature that seems to be synonymous with this trope is the continuing valorization of these films by the Hollywood establishment, both in their seeming yearly production by large studios, distribution in convenient time for awards season and positive reception from the Academy in decision making roles regarding awards such as the Oscars and Golden Globes. Therefore, the reviews of two of these films in the time period is highly relevant for further empirical work on developments in Hollywood media attitudes following the #OscarsSoWhite controversy in which this establishment was criticized by audiences and the more liberal portion of the United States' media sphere as lacking diversity and

representation of film professionals from non-white minority groups.

The attitudes of critics towards these films were one of the most telling indicators for the use of colourblind ideology in these reviews. Key distinctions arose from whether critics chose to minimize the White Saviour trope within the films narrative along with its societal impact, whilst other reviewers were much more forthright about the societal damage that the perpetuation of this aesthetic representation of whiteness within Hollywood perpetuates. A clear example of this within the review for *Hidden Figures* is in Marie Hicks' piece for *The Guardian*. Amongst what is a relatively positive review of the film, she identifies the problematic nature of one of the white male characters' roles in a story that has three African-American female protagonists:

“At this point, Nasa manager Al Harrison, played by Kevin Costner, comes into the frame.

Despite being an amalgam of three different Nasa employees, Harrison somehow seems to do no actual work. Perhaps this is a subtle satire of the management class, but it also means his character simply takes up space in someone else’s story. Costner is shoehorned into the story as the white male hero who lifts the women up. The role is problematic, uncritically centring an unremarkable white man in a story about three brilliant black women, and the decision to cast a well-known star steals focus from the female leads.” (Hicks 2018, paragraphs 5-6)

Hicks' overt identification of the White Saviour trope being used in this film frames her review of being critical with the status quo in Hollywood that continues to produce and valorize these films with awards. Hughey goes on to give context to the implications of this stating that, in relation to the white saviour trope “whether arguing over the content of the films themselves, the evaluations of film critics, the meaning-making of these films by a heterogeneous consumer public, people wrangle over the site and suitability of the white saviour and stake out a position along the spectrum of evaluations: good to bad, progressive to racist, and stereotype to true story” (Hughey 2014, p. 3). Whilst the White Saviour trope has gained notoriety in the popular discourse, some critics choose to minimize its impact in an attempt to praise the films for their 'feel-good' messaging. The fact that critics minimize this problematic trope is emblematic of one of the central tenets of colourblind racism - minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2011) - in which whites minimize the impact of things like a lack of diversity by claiming, in one way or another, that racism is a thing of the past. This is also one of the key tenets of the White Saviour trope itself, with their representation of historical period dramas depicting overt racial discrimination in settings like the US' Deep South. Whether criticizing the films for their use of the White Saviour trope or minimizing its influence on the film's societal implications, all critics seemed to agree that the two films in question demonstrated a 'middle of the road politics' that aligned with Hollywood's more recent position of being relatively liberal in its criticism of overt racism and gender inequality whilst repeating narratives that aim to offend as few audiences and demographics as possible.

4.4 Influence of Personal Experience

Perhaps predictably, the race of reviewers had an undeniable impact on the way in which they related to and

discussed films with overt racially-oriented narratives such as *Green Book*, *Hidden Figures*, *Detroit* and *Get Out*, with more subtle influences on discourse with the other films reviewed. This frame was interestingly also identified in Anderson & Grether's (2017) study on reviews of Hollywood films with a black protagonist, in the way that White and Black reviewers differed in the ways they personally related to films. In this thesis' research, this is most evident in the way in which African-American critics relate their own personal experiences of not only racism but African-American cultural identity. This first becomes apparent in an African-American critic's synopsis of the plot of *Get out*:

“Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) and Rose (Allison Williams) have been dating five months, and it’s time for Chris to meet Rose’s parents. “Do they know I’m black?” Chris asks as they pack to go to Rose’s parent’s house on some wypipo lake in a wypipo town.” (D.Young, 2017 paragraph 2)

Here, Danielle Young- a critic for African-American focused online news website *The Root*- uses the African-American colloquialism 'wypipo' – meaning white people – primarily for comedic effect but also to make the article more relatable for its intended audience. The function of this here also serves the critic to differentiate herself from the field of other reviews of *Get Out*, which- both from mainstream and more specifically targeted sources- are predominantly written by white-males.

This critic also demonstrates a clear knowledge and appreciation for African-American social dynamics throughout her review which differs from the purely intellectual appreciation that the White film critics have for the film and its subversive narrative. This is clearly illustrated when the reviewer refers to a scene in which the African-American protagonist of the film changes his verbal and body language when introducing himself to another African-American visitor at a White family party:

“Chris is thrust into a town where there are few black people. And when he encounters the few who are there, he switches up his tone and handshake, saying, “What’s up?” instead of hello, when addressing a fellow black man. He’s not met with the same tone and inflection. When the other black men respond to Chris, they don’t code-switch.” (D.Young, 2017 paragraph 9)

The critic's reference to code-switching, a linguistic term that has been adopted by minority groups in the United States and particularly the African-American community that describes the way in which African-Americans adapt their behaviour when associating with White people and other African-Americans respectively, is intriguing here. The identification of this subtle change in behaviour within this scene is only mentioned by the African-American critic despite its significance in addressing the racial discourse within the film. Code-switching for African-Americans interestingly has a direct link to one of the themes of Blackness previously discussed within this thesis- double-consciousness. The recognition of the differing personas that this character adopts is illustrative of the 'Duality of blackness' (Du Bois 1903), being both Black and American. Contrasted

with the other reviews of *Get Out*, White reviewers tended to stray away from any sort of personal reflection on the content of the film, instead praising it on a technical and intellectual level for its subversiveness and challenging of Hollywood tropes. What is also intriguing about the relationship between the White critics and their interpretation of *Get Out*'s narrative content is the way in which they recognize the film's challenging of White-liberal colourblind racism and its socio-political position as challenging 'post-racial' America.

This use of personal reflexivity within the reviews written by African-American critics also finds itself foregrounded in Drew-Shane Daniels's review for *Ebony Magazine*, in which he also relates his own experiences of intersectionality through both his race and sexuality to the narrative of the film, which gives his review a level of evocativeness and a personal nature that the White reviewers generally stray away from.

“Jenkins beautifully uses race, class, and sexuality as the backdrop to tell this poignant story. It is easy to think the movie only focuses on sexuality; however, the film offers a more relatable story about Black boys finding their own identity. In this movie, I saw pieces of my childhood, like wondering what made some boys think I was a “faggot” and learning how to stand up for myself.” (Daniels 2016, paragraph 4)

The significance of this is the way in which, due to the lack of racial diversity amongst film critics, when African-Americans have been discussed in these reviews it has been from the perspective of Whiteness.

4.5 Hollywood's Lack of Diversity

With many of the films included in this data-set having explicit racial content and differing levels of diversity and racial representation, perhaps inevitably the discussion of Hollywood's historical approach to diversity has been raised from a number of different angles by these critics that help to answer the research question of this thesis. A number of critics overtly identified and criticized previous tropes and stereotypes of African-Americans in Hollywood films

A Wrinkle In Time's reviews highlighted one intriguing inconsistency in the general politically liberal consensus of these critics in relation to race. This film was discussed by critics as having an intentionally multicultural cast that differs from racial representation in the novel it was based on. The discussion of this multicultural and racially diverse cast highlighted some fascinating inherent political biases of critics as well as attitudes towards diversity. In his review for the British online newspaper *MailOnline*, Matthew Bond appears to take an implicitly adverse stance towards the film's diverse casting:

“As well as updating the action to the present day, director Ava DuVernay – best known for the civil-rights drama *Selma* – has overseen other changes too, the most noticeable of which is that this is now an ethnically ‘correct’ production.

The Murry family have become mixed-race, with Chris Pine playing the father and Gugu Mbatha-Raw the mother, while the three Mrs Ws are now Caucasian, Indian-American and African-American respectively.

As for any Hispanics feeling left out... well, Michael Peña will be along as Red shortly, albeit playing a baddie.

There will, I know, be those irritated by such an overt show of political correctness” (Bond 2018, paragraph 5)

Here Bond displays a level of sarcasm in regards to Director Ava DuVernay's diverse casting choices, placing the word 'correct' in quotation marks. This is supported by his acknowledgement that some potential audiences would be 'irritated by such an overt show of political correctness'. This view suggests an element of cynicism surrounding what the critic may view to be colourblind casting, in which actors of colour are selected for roles that don't necessarily stipulate a certain race in an attempt to increase levels of minority representation on screen (Yuen 2018). The cynicism here reflects something which seems to be relatively rare within contemporary Hollywood film criticism, an alternative socio-political stance towards racial representation and diversity that leans to the right of the traditional political spectrum.

In contrast to this, Alissa Wilkinson of Vox had a different take on the films use of multicultural casting. She claims that through the casting of actors from numerous minority groups, *A Wrinkle In Time* served as a counterpoint to the homogeneity that films of this size- DuVernay was the first African-American woman to make a film with a budget of over \$100 million- often represent through the market dynamics that major Hollywood studios often cite as the reason for casting White-males in leading roles. She goes on to say:

“in many respects, it feels like *Wrinkle* is constructed specifically to counteract a kind of homogeneity that can dominate movies like this. The casting, for instance, makes Meg biracial, Mrs. Murray and Mrs. Which black, Mrs. Who and Charles Murray Asian (he is adopted) — none of which is in the book, but none of which is substantially excluded by the book, either. Mrs. Who’s quotations are carefully drawn from sources all over the world, and she names the country of the speaker each time. The movie chooses to thwart traditional onscreen Hollywood sameness.” (Wilkinson 2018, paragraph 6)

Whilst the challenging of traditional Hollywood stereotypes is a highly relevant theme within this analysis, it is Wilkinson's positive attitude towards the diversity of *A Wrinkle in Time* that contrasts with Bond's cynicism. This recognition of Hollywood's historic 'sameness' is echoed throughout the majority of this data-set, as critics appear to have shifted attitudes towards a consensus that diverse representation needs to increase in mainstream cinema. It would also appear that *A Wrinkle In Time* has been critically accepted in this way alongside recent studies that Hollywood has steadily increased its on-screen diversity following the #OscarsSoWhite controversy. Wilkinson's reference to 'movies like this' is also significant here, as *A Wrinkle in Time* could certainly be considered a blockbuster release with its high budget and major distribution. The fact that Wilkinson places the discourse of Hollywood diversity in the context of a blockbuster film goes some way as to illustrate the way in which the homogeneity of Whiteness within the higher economic end of the Hollywood film industry is being challenged by those both in the media and the industry, as attitudes towards the viability of diverse film casts and

crews seems to have changed following #OscarsSoWhite (evidence). In support of this, Carla Renata of Ebony magazine also had a great deal of praise not only for the level of diversity in the cast but also for the messaging of the film's narrative and its overall societal impact. She praises the positivity of the film and its apparently optimistic outlook:

“A Wrinkle in Time is a beautiful, fantastical message about how being different is what makes one unique. Why walk around trying to be someone else, when being you is so much more interesting. Be uniquely you, take a child to see A Wrinkle in time when it opens in theaters nationwide on March 9th to tap into YOUR inner child.”

(Renata, 2018 paragraph 8)

She clearly states here her admiration for the story's empowering content, and its target audience of children. What is interesting in both of these cases explaining the film's merits as a feel-good film with the positive message of diversity is that the film does not receive much technical praise from critics, and in fact in five out of the six cases analyzed here (with the exception of Renata's review) there is a great deal of technical criticism for the production, and its inadequacy in relation to the source material it was based on. Critics claim that it relies too heavily on CGI and that DuVernay's adaptation fails to include some of the more interesting ideas from the original novel. This suggests that whilst diversity in casting and behind the camera is something that Hollywood is making a move towards, the plastic representation of minority groups in film and TV that Warner (2017) has theorized can often lead to negative results such as the ones discussed in these reviews when importance is placed by major studios on meeting diversity quotas rather than writing complex and three-dimensional roles for minority actors.

4.6 Contemporary Racial Context

Critics from both mainstream and specific sources, when reviewing films with racial content, sought to place the films' societal relevance within the context of the United States' contemporary racial & political climate to varying degrees. In turn, this became one of the most highly populated coding groups, with critics eager to make links between aesthetic judgements and the societal contexts of films. The use of this frame also highlights how influential the United States' racial discourse is, with recent racial violence frequently mentioned by reviewers when discussing racially orientated narratives. Justin Chang of the Los Angeles Times shows that mainstream reviewers such as himself are not afraid to criticize Hollywood despite their key role in the industry as critics:

“The scene is a jolting piece of suspense craftsmanship and a clever dismantling of several decades' worth of racist stereotypes: The black guy walking alone on a dark street, so routinely depicted as a figure of fear, menace and criminality, is here recast as a frightened, vulnerable innocent....

Part of the thrill of "Get Out" — a thrill that springs from a place of very real, entirely justified anger — is that it feels like a long-overdue response to Hollywood's collective failure. This is surely the nerviest, most confrontational treatment of race in America to emerge from a major studio in years, and it brilliantly fulfills the duty of both its chosen genres — the horror-thriller and the social satire — to meaningfully reflect a culture's latent fears and anxieties." (Chang 2017, paragraphs 2-3)

Here he acknowledges the film's subversive content, along with the fact that its wide distribution through a major production company (Universal) has a great deal of societal relevance. Once again a critic also identifies previous tropes and stereotypes that Hollywood has reinforced historically, as well as praising a film that aims to challenge these stereotypes. It is a positive thing that mainstream critics are recognizing this in this data-set, showing that whilst there might still be large disparities between the use of the kind of colourblind ideology that leads critics to valorize White Saviour films and more niche critics highlighting the problems with this, there are points of convergence on which all critics reject the racist stereotypes that Hollywood has historically perpetuated.

Whilst this unified front on the rejection of stereotypes and the need for greater diversity in Hollywood, what is also intriguing is the way in which contemporary racial context is largely ignored in reviews for *Hidden Figures* and *Green Book*. The significance of this is that one of the more problematic issues of films that can be classified as having 'White Saviour' narratives is that they frame racial discourse as something that we have moved past as a society. Hughey (2014) goes further to say that these White-Saviour narratives act as "racialized hagiographies: essays on the lives of cinematic saints that emphasize their natural superiority, alleviates white guilt, and overcomes prejudicial character flaws with aplomb" (p. 118). The lack of discussion of the United States contemporary racial discourse in the reviews of these two movies limits the opportunity for critics to contextualize racially themed films for wide audiences. One of the few instances that the contemporary racial context of *Green Book* is mentioned is by African-American critic Brooke Obie for *Shadow and Act*:

"I keep circling back to Lip's racism because it baffles me that in 2018 Hollywood is still in the business of not only humanizing racists but letting racists like Lip tell stories about Black people. Because *Green Book* is not just about Dr. Shirley through Lip's eyes. It's also about the everyday, non-prodigy Black people that Lip and Dr. Shirley encounter on their journey." (Obie 2018, paragraph 17)

Here Obie highlights her disdain in making reference to the fact that the White Saviour trope is still alive in Hollywood through narratives like *Green Book*'s. She focuses on the function of the White Saviour narrative that Hughey (2014) has written about, in that it centres the white perspective in a racially orientated story, in a way 'othering' the very people who face discrimination and structural racism. Obie's exasperation that this trope still exists today contrasts with other attitudes towards *Green Book*, who suggest that its impact on the contemporary

racial landscape in the US is of less concern, or is at least less harmful. This goes back to the first sub-question of this thesis, in that it highlights the different perspectives that emerge from critics of different races- in which African-American critics are much more aware and critical of the influence of Whiteness in Hollywood.

4.7 Positive & Negative Markers

In terms of more general criticism, both positive and negative markers were easily identifiable when analyzing each text, but both in their frequency and content can provide intriguing insights into the ways in which critics both White and African-American, mainstream and specific talk about these films when giving them a positive or negative appraisal. In terms of positive markers, there are a number of different examples of a disparity between the positive descriptions that white critics give predominantly African-American films and those made by and starring Whites. When praising white directors such as Martin McDonagh (*Three Billboards*) and Kathryn Bigelow (*Detroit*), critics highlighted the director's intellect as either being part of the reason for their films' success (McDonagh) or in a more general comment about their pedigree as a director (Bigelow). An example of this can be seen in the way that Owen Gleiberman praises the complexity of the narrative written by Martin McDonagh for *Three Billboards*:

“Not where you think. “*Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*” isn’t a righteous demagogic attack on the complacency of the police, or on masculine violence and privilege — though it *is* a meditation on those things. It’s not a whodunit with a clear villain and a connect-the-dots suspense plot that will lead to his capture — though it plays off our desire for all that. Lastly, it’s not a tale that offers a pat resolution — though when it’s over, you feel like you’ve been on a journey, and that McDonagh has led us through the paces and pleasures of a three-act story in a stylized, postmodern way.” (Gleiberman 2017, paragraph 5)

Here Gleiberman is highly complimentary of the complexity of the narrative and its societal relevance, stating that McDonagh has structured his story in a 'stylized, postmodern way', suggesting a high level of intricacy that reflects his skill as a writer. This is more intriguing when compared with the way in which critics praise films starring and directed by African-Americans, as well as the negative markers that were used to appraise films. In terms of these negative markers, table three shows there were clearly films that garnered more negative criticism than others. The three most universally derided by critics were *Detroit* and *Green Book*, which is intriguing considering *Green Book* actually won the 2019 Academy Award for best picture. Whilst *Detroit* mainly drew negative criticism from both White and African-American critics for its perceived mishandling of racially-charged content- it features a fictionalized historical representation of police brutality and murder in Detroit- it was praised by some critics as being societally important and provocative. However, in regards to *Green Book* in particular, critics were highly critical of what they perceived to be the ‘safety’ of the narrative. A.O. Scott of the

New York Times is a critic that takes particular issue with this, as he writes:

“There is virtually no milestone in this tale of interracial male friendship that you won’t see coming from a long way off, including scenes that seem too corny or misguided for any movie in its right mind to contemplate. “Siri, please tell me they’re not going there.” Oh, but they are....

Every suspicion you might entertain — that this will be a sentimental tale of prejudices overcome and common humanity affirmed; that its politics will be as gently middle-of-the-road as its humor; that it will invite a measure of self-congratulation about how far we, as a nation, have come — will be confirmed.” (Scott 2018, paragraphs 2-4)

What is interesting about this excerpt is that Scott, a white critic for a mainstream source, seemingly takes issue with the recycling of Hollywood narrative tropes and stereotypes. What is encouraging about this from a wider societal perspective is that the criticism for the film’s ‘middle-of-the-road politics’ is echoed throughout the reviews for *Green Book*- with reviews for *Hidden Figures* following a similar trend. The negative attitudes towards films that reify racial stereotypes and ‘play it safe’ politically perhaps reflect an acknowledgement by critics of the societal context, in which racial discourse is presently turbulent and the United States’ politics polarized on this issue. Critics negatively criticizing Hollywood films that don’t address these societal frictions, and praising films like *Get Out* that do, shows a level of understanding of the influence of film on society, and the need for a wide range of perspectives that challenge stereotypes and societal norms in the United States.

4.8 Conclusion of Analysis

To summarize the results of this analysis, a number of key themes emerged that have a distinct relationship with one another. Applying Fairclough's (1995) model of critical discourse analysis to these results here is important. On the textual level, studying the language used by critics from differing sources and backgrounds was fruitful. Professional critics from mainstream sources generally tended to use language that placed films with racial content relative to other films, intellectualizing their content rather than drawing on personal experience when discussing race. This is significant when compared to more specific sources, in particular those written by African-Americans, as they seek to place racially orientated narratives in the context of their own personal experiences of marginalization and discrimination, rather than relating the narratives to other films in each genre. A conclusion to be drawn from this analysis of language is that, perhaps due to mainstream professional critics' Whiteness or comfortable socio-economic position (or both), they have less personal experience of racial discourse than their African-American counterparts. Whilst this may be an unfair characterization and criticism of mainstream professional critics as their roles require them to connect with as wide an audience as possible, racial discourse in the United States is highly prominent presently with tensions having risen over the past few years following anti-immigration sentiments and prominent cases of police violence against African-Americans giving rise to the Black Lives Matter movement. So, it seems the responsibility of writers, when discussing films

with explicit racial content, to comment on this racial discourse meaningfully. Taking all elements of this critical discourse analysis into account, further discussion and a complete conclusion will be offered here.

5 – Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 – Discussion of Analysis

This thesis has set out to examine the ways in which critics of Hollywood films discuss race through the reception of a range of different contemporary films that either have an explicitly racially orientated narrative or production crews with varying levels of racial diversity. The results of this analysis show that Blackness is frequently discussed in reviews of films that have African-American protagonists and directors. Whilst this is reflective of the levels of diversity in the films chosen for this data-set, the comparison with the ways that Whiteness is *not* discussed is reflective of it going largely unmarked, showing a failure by critics to address Whiteness adequately as a racial characteristic and group in the same way that Blackness is discussed. The research gap and primary need for this analysis was the fact that there had not been a contemporary comparison of the ways in which critics discuss race in reviews of films with *both* African-American and White protagonists, whilst also taking into account the race of the Director.

The use of critical discourse analysis within this thesis has highlighted some very useful results that, put into context of the US' turbulent political climate with regards to race and identity, go some way as to explore ways that film criticism both challenges and perpetuates racial theory such as Blackness, Whiteness and colourblind racism to varying degrees. Scholarly attention has seldom been devoted to the ways that film reviews address racialized characters from multiple racial groups. Anderson & Grether (2017) had also highlighted the need for a study that is positioned in the context of the current racial and political climate in the US, which this thesis has also set out to do, framing this analysis from 2015 to the present day. It is essential to pay close attention to how racial stereotypes are perceived by media outlets because they, in turn, help to shape the climate of racial understanding and interaction in the United States (Anderson & Grether 2017, Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan 2002).

One clear area of comparison that gathered intriguing insights was looking at the different ways that White critics and African-American critics talk about race in the films in the data set. Both constructions of Blackness and Whiteness took different forms, but generally white critics sought to intellectualize race and frame the racial content included in films such as *Detroit* and *Hidden Figures*, whilst also comparing them to other films and drawing comparisons rather than being reflexive and relating the films to their personal experiences. African-American critics however did the opposite, as whilst in some cases they made similar comparisons, there was a great deal more personal reflexivity on the films' content and socio-political implications. As has previously been discussed, other studies have sought to explore critical reception of White Saviour films specifically (Hughey 2010, 2014), as well as the ways that critics have constructed race in reviews of films with African-American protagonists (Anderson & Grether 2017).

One similarity and common thread that ran throughout all of the reviews, both in discussion of new perspectives offered by African-American filmmakers of films with problematic elements such as the White Saviour trope, was an agreement that Hollywood has *historically* lacked diversity and perpetuated unhelpful racial stereotypes. This is perhaps a predictable conclusion given the ubiquity of the #OscarsSoWhite media cycle and subsequent campaigns calling for more on-screen diversity in Hollywood, but a general consensus- with a few notable exceptions- that a move towards greater diversity is not only something desirable but something that the industry is slowly working towards is a positive conclusion to be drawn from these results. However, the previously mentioned difference in perspective between White and African-American reviewers when discussing race within the films is emblematic of a lack of diversity amongst film critics, which is another problem in and of itself. Another intriguing conclusion is that, despite the majority of critics' acknowledgement of Hollywood's historical lack of diversity and creation of racial stereotypes, the films that could be categorized as having 'White Saviour' narratives were still positively reviewed and valorized by mainstream critics. The significance of this is that it almost seems paradoxical to identify a problem with the lack of diversity on-screen and behind the camera, and then go on to praise films that perpetuate tropes and stereotypes that minimize the societal influence of the US' racial discourse. The two films in question here- both historical dramas set around the time of the

civil-rights movement- frame open discrimination and racism as a phenomenon relegated to history, rather than still existing in the present day. Whilst once again it may be unfair to criticize these mainstream critics for their subjective opinions on these films, highlighting a lack of diversity and then simultaneously praising films that centre the white perspective when commenting on racial divides raises a contradiction that calls into question these critics' understanding of racial dynamics in the US. However, it is significant that the #OscarsSoWhite controversy at the 2015 Oscars seems to have prompted critics to discuss Hollywood's historical lack of diversity and creation of racial stereotypes at the very least. If the move is, as these results suggest, towards a more inclusive Hollywood that has begun in recent years, what will this more inclusive Hollywood look like? Warner (2017) suggests that attitudes have shifted further, moving towards an industry that truly values a wide range of perspectives, where complex roles are written for marginalized groups and jobs earned through a genuine desire for alternatives to a hegemony of white perspectivism. Dyer presciently had similar doubts about the meeting of diversity quotas and some of the motivations for these desires- "Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West. But it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them." (Dyer 1997, p.132).

Taking all of this into account, this research has discovered that, on the balance, reviews of films made since #OscarsSoWhite have demonstrated an acute acknowledgement of the United States' contemporary racial discourse. Whiteness continues, however to shape and perpetuate Hollywood's lack of diversity, as despite critics' increased understanding and acknowledgement of racial issues and cultural identity, the majority of critics are still white-male, and this forms a dominant perspective when Hollywood films are reviewed, as white critics do not identify characteristics of Whiteness. This is reflected through the majority of critics' reluctance to reference their own personal experiences when discussing race in films, which could work to alienate minority-group audiences as they read reviews and see a lack of representation for perspectives similar to theirs. Overall, this research has shown that critical attitudes towards race have started to change in Hollywood, widespread critical appreciation of African-American voices and faces being represented on screen, along with critics identifying problematic Hollywood tropes and stereotypes such as the White Saviour narrative. However the lack of diversity amongst critics reifies the dominance of the White perspective in the United States, as whilst on-screen and behind-the-camera representation has grown for marginalized groups, the community of film critics that help to shape audience opinion as mediators (DeBenedetti 2006) remains predominantly white. Therefore, the next-step for Hollywood to offer a truly diverse set of perspectives that accurately reflects the diversity of the American population is for film criticism to become more racially inclusive.

5.2 – Limitations of research

This research of course does not come without its clear limitations. A quantitative aspect to this research in which a greater number of reviews were analyzed to identify the amount of times race was mentioned by reviewers, perhaps comparatively contrasting the results with research from a time period pre-dating #OscarsSoWhite to show empirically how calls for greater diversity in Hollywood in the mainstream media have impacted the frequency of racial discourse in reviews. Also, the data set presented here, whilst selected adhering to a number of variables, might've benefitted from a clearer research design in which there was a more definitive relationship between the publications used and the films selected. In terms of practical limitations, it was in some cases difficult to find a wide range of different African-American writers and publications, with only three or four having wide readership, so a wider range of different African-American perspectives was not available when looking at film reviews.

5.3 – Suggestions for future research

Following the findings of this research it is clear that a lot of progress can be made in this field with further research exploring a number of related topics. The first of these would consist of a similar discourse analysis that looks at the way in which a wide range of different marginalized groups are discussed in film reviews. Yuen's (2018) research has shown that Latin-Americans are the United States' least represented racial group in Hollywood relative to their share of the US population- so some sort of analysis that discovers the ways in which Latin-Americans are discussed by critics in comparison with other racial groups- such as Asian-Americans- may provide some intriguing conclusions. A similar study might also expand the frame of this research to a transnational context, shifting the focus from Hollywood to other countries' film industries. Whilst Hollywood presents the largest and most economically lucrative of the world's film industries, a comparison with critical attitudes towards race in other countries could provide some fascinating results. Finally, whilst this research provided a qualitative analysis of a relatively small number of film critics in a specific time period, a larger quantitative study showing the expanse of a wide range of critical reception of both white and black-directed films might give some idea of the diversity amongst film critics and what impact that this has on box-office performance.

6 - Appendix

6.1 - Table of critics & characteristics of reviews

Film	Critic (race)	Word Count	Publication	Publication Type
Moonlight (2016)	Peter Debruge (White)	943	Variety	Mainstream
Moonlight (2016)	David Rooney (White)	1,312	The Hollywood Reporter	Mainstream
Moonlight (2016)	Brian Tallerico (White)	990	RogerEbert.com	Mainstream
Moonlight (2016)	Richard Brody (White)	1,433	The New Yorker	Specific
Moonlight (2016)	Adam Nayman (White)	789	Sight & Sound	Specific
Moonlight (2016)	Drew-Shane Daniels (African-American)	890	Ebony	Specific (African American)
Get Out (2017)	Justin Chang (Asian-American)	1,061	Los Angeles Times	Mainstream
Get Out (2017)	Mark Kermode (White)	770	The Guardian	Mainstream
Get Out (2017)	Peter Travers (White)	508	Rolling Stone	Mainstream
Get Out (2017)	David Ehrlich (White)	898	IndieWire	Specific
Get Out (2017)	Keith Watson (White)	678	Slant Magazine	Specific
Get Out (2017)	Danielle Young (African-American)	1,003	The Root	Specific (African American)
A Wrinkle In Time (2018)	Ann Hornaday (White)	774	Washington Post	Mainstream
A Wrinkle In Time (2018)	Frank Swietek (White)	790	One Guy's Opinion	Specific
A Wrinkle In Time (2018)	Matt Zoller Seitz (White)	1,075	RogerEbert.com	Mainstream
A Wrinkle In Time (2018)	Alissa Wilkinson (White)	2,485	Vox	Specific*
A Wrinkle In Time (2018)	Carla Renata (African-American)	515	Ebony	Specific (African American)
A Wrinkle In Time (2018)	Matthew Bond (White)	789	MailOnline	Mainstream
Detroit (2017)	Angelica Jade Bastien (African American)	1,488	RogerEbert.com	Mainstream*
Detroit (2017)	Todd McCarthy (White)	1,437	The Hollywood Reporter	Mainstream
Detroit (2017)	Peter Travers (White)	1,017	Rolling Stone	Mainstream
Detroit (2017)	Ignatiy Vishnevetsky (White)	858	The Onion A.V. Club	Specific
Detroit (2017)	Dwight Brown (African-American)	1,019	BlackPressUSA	Specific (African American)
Detroit (2017)	Peter Bradshaw (White)	721	The Guardian	Mainstream
Hidden Figures (2016)	Marie Hicks (White)	1,036	The Guardian	Mainstream
Hidden Figures (2016)	David Jenkins (White)	507	Little White Lies	Specific
Hidden Figures (2016)	Nsenga K. Burton Ph.D (African-American)	928	The Root	Specific (African American)
Hidden Figures (2016)	Peter Debruge (White)	1,007	Variety	Mainstream
Hidden Figures (2016)	Kenneth Turan (White)	806	Los Angeles Times	Mainstream
Hidden Figures (2016)	Scott Tobias (White)	758	NPR	Specific
Green Book (2018)	Peter Travers (White)	623	Rolling Stone	Mainstream
Green Book (2018)	A.O. Scott (White)	793	New York Times	Mainstream
Green Book (2018)	Toddy McCarthy (White)	901	The Hollywood Reporter	Mainstream
Green Book (2018)	Brooke Obie (African-American)	2,009	Shadow & Act	Specific (African American)
Green Book (2018)	Jourdain Searles (African-American)	1,700	The Ringer	Specific
Green Book (2018)	A.A. Dowd (White)	1,005	The Onion A.V. Club	Specific
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017)	Brian Tallerico (White)	930	RogerEbert.com	Mainstream
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017)	Owen Gleiberman (White)	1,133	Variety	Mainstream
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017)	Christopher Orr (White)	1,017	The Atlantic	Mainstream
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017)	Kenneth Turan (White)	831	Los Angeles Times	Mainstream
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017)	Ben Croll (White)	834	IndieWire	Specific
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017)	K. Austin Collins (African American)	2,040	The Ringer	Specific
	Average word count:	1,026		
	Highest:	2,485		
	Lowest:	507		

6.2 - Coding Scheme

List of Codes

- Acknowledges colourblind racism

- acknowledges intellect of Director
 - actors bring life to predictable trope
 - Actors undercut by director's choices
- Addresses lack of films w/ Intersectional narrative
- Addresses prejudice that poor African Americans face
 - Addresses race head-on
 - Addresses tropes of white liberalism
 - Addresses white privilege in narrative
 - African American colloquialism
 - Ahistorical
 - all of production team to blame
 - All White supporting cast
- amount of racial violence depicted admirable
 - Anti-establishment sentiment
 - Beautiful in spite of...
 - Black actors make up for shortcomings
 - black character more interesting
- Black characters don't get substantial roles
 - black characters used as props
 - Black Lives Matter
- Blames writer for performance of John Boyega
 - Broadness of film
 - Challenges Hollywood narratives
 - challenges homogeneity
 - Challenges Stereotypes
 - challenges toxic masculinity
 - Challenges typical blockbusters
 - Challenges whiteness with 3 AA leads
 - Characterization of Black Drug Dealer
 - codes of black masculinity
 - Code-switch
 - colourblind comparison
 - Colourblindness in narrative
 - colour-blindness of progressives
 - comedy come from humiliation of minorities
 - Compares to other 'WSF'
 - Comparison to Black Panther character
 - Comparison to Mr Rogers 'Neighbourhood'
 - complex depiction of Blackness
 - Complexity of characters
 - Complexity of narrative
 - Context of current events for AA identity
 - Corny
- Critic uses humour to mock narrative & context
 - critical of acting and production
 - Critical of portrayal of black characters
 - Critical of previous Black Gay films
 - Criticism for actors
 - Criticism of adaptation
 - criticism of source material
 - criticizes racism in narrative
 - criticizes racist character
 - Criticizes studio
 - Crowd pleasing
 - deeply disturbed
 - degrading scene
 - Denies White Saviour trope
 - Depiction of impacts of drugs on AA's complex
- Depicts horrible racist cop, but not the systemic racism
 - Desire for inclusivity ignores Christian audience
 - Details of negative environment add depth
 - developed black female characters
 - Director doesn't understand blackness
 - Director lacks understanding of racial history
 - Director managed expectations of audience

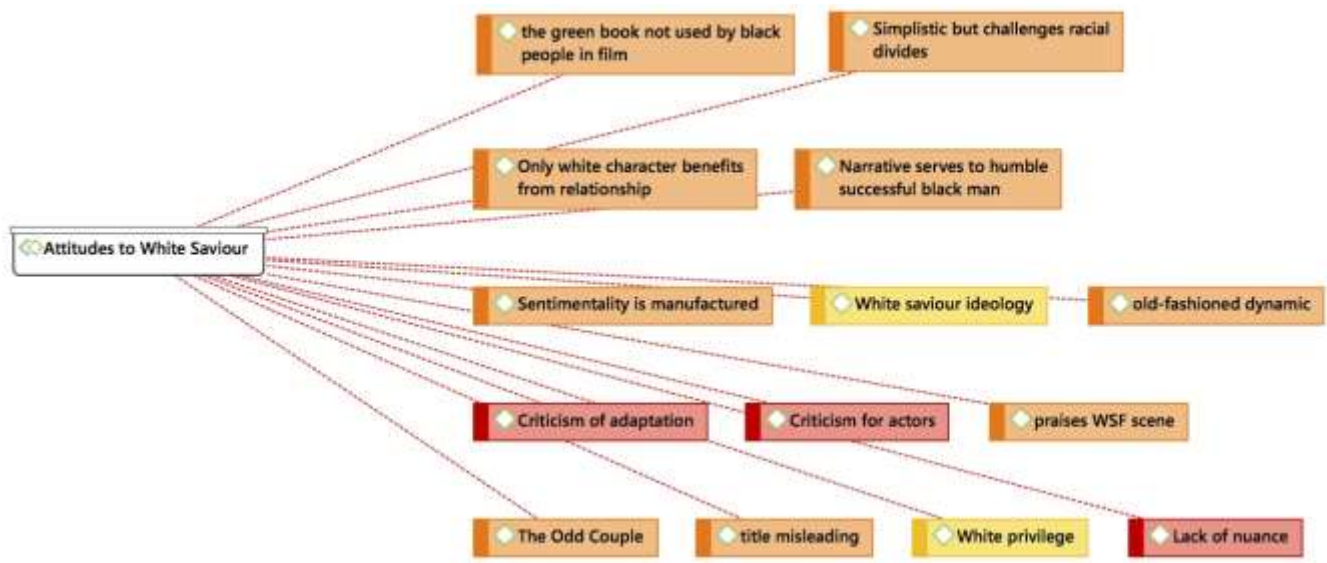
- director overwhelmed by first project of this size
 - Director plays it safe
 - director shows absurdity of Jim Crow
 - Director's background of crude comedies
 - diversity of film 'surface-level'
 - Doesn't address systemic racism
 - doesn't address US racial discourse meaningfully
 - doesn't identify white saviour
 - Doesn't link to socio-political context
 - doesn't live up to source material
 - Dr Shirley 'not black enough'
 - Driving Miss Daisy
 - Duality of Blackness
- DuVernay criticised relative to other fantasy film
 - easy laughs & harsh realities
 - Emotional complexity of character
 - emotionally complex
 - empowering young black women
 - Empowerment cinema
 - Emptiness of depictions
 - Enhancing stereotyped role
 - Evocative for audience
 - exploitative
 - fails as a comedy and racial commentary
 - faultless review
 - Feel-good with depth
 - female gender markers
 - Feminist theme
 - film addresses institutional racism
 - Film boldly comments on race
 - film centres white perspective
 - Film has moral merits but is bad
 - film has relevance & passion
 - Film misrepresents racial history
 - Film not societally useful
 - Films made by Black directors more impactful
 - First AA woman w/ big budget
 - Framing of story hinders empowerment
 - fully developed and complex character
 - Fun but cliché
 - gender politics
 - generic feel-good vibe
 - Green Book comforting for white audience
 - Highlights lack of diversity in genre
 - Historical context
 - Hollywood humanizes racists
 - Hollywood reminds itself it's not racist
 - Hollywood tropes weaken message
 - Hollywood's lack of diversity
 - Identifies intersectional narrative
 - Identifies own Blackness
 - Identifies theme of Blackness
 - Identifies traits of whiteness
 - If Beale Street Could Talk
 - inspiring, imaginative
 - interracial buddy comedies
 - intersectionality poorly handled
 - Intimacy, Naturalistic
 - Irony obvious
 - Italian-American cliché
 - Kitsch
 - Kitsch a positive
 - Lack of nuance
 - Lead actress capable, sturdy, self-possessed
 - Lead performances give film merit

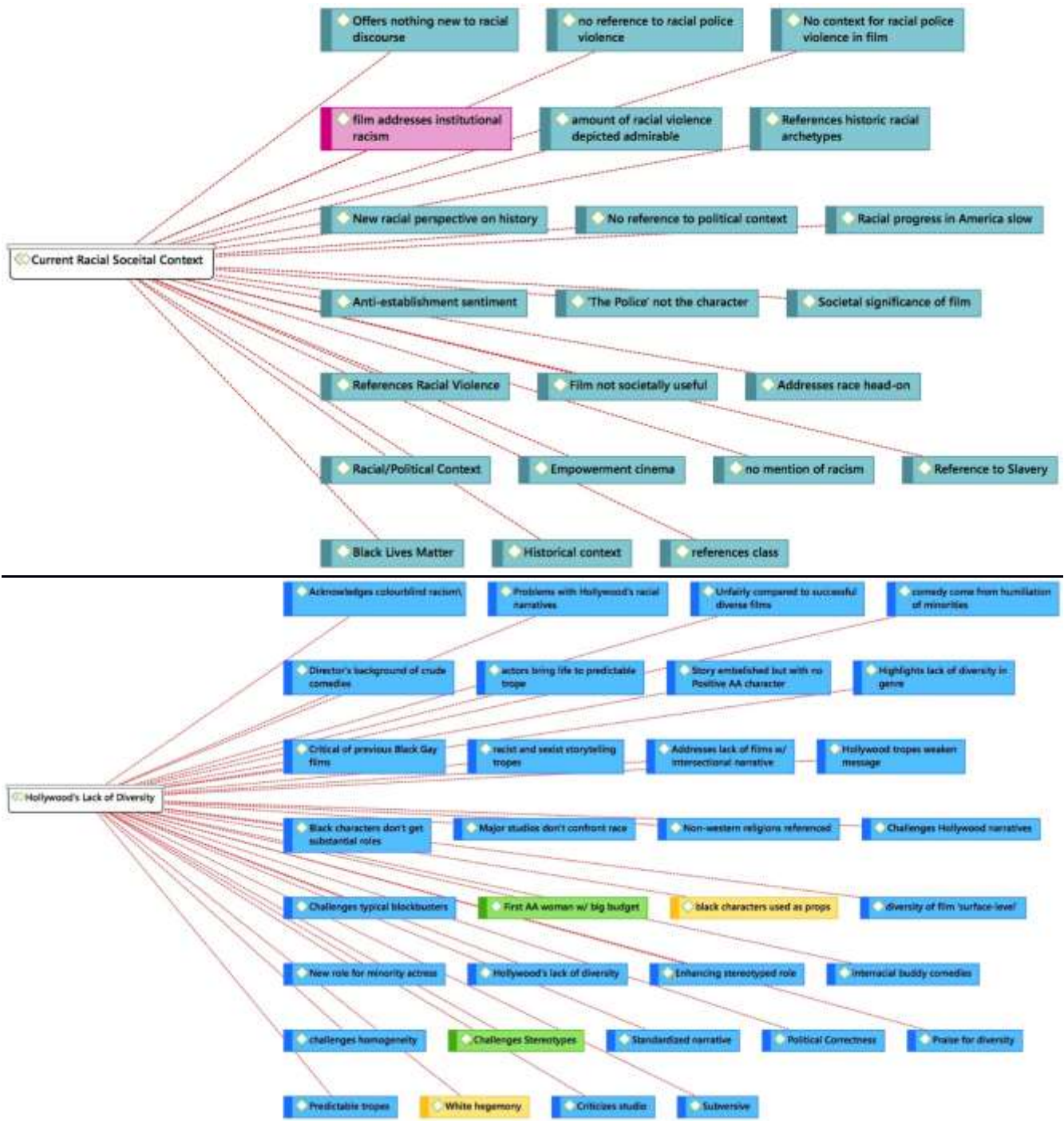
- light hearted racism contrasted with ugliness of american south
 - Likeable diversion to racial tensions
 - Likes director's previous work
 - Links to Director's other films about violence
 - lives up to the hype
 - love overcomes hate & prejudice
 - low brow humour
 - Major studios don't confront race
 - Marked Blackness
 - marked whiteness
 - masculine violence and privileged
 - Mentions racism but no minority characters
 - Merits lie in focus on Black characters
 - middle-of-the-road politics
 - Misleading racial violence reference
 - Mocks diversity
 - morally ambiguous
 - multicultural casting
 - narrative built around racist protagonist
- Narrative serves to humble successful black man
 - 'natural' way to tell story
- Negative stereotypes of Black Gay Characters
 - New racial perspective on history
 - New role for minority actress
 - no clear heroes or villains
- No context for racial police violence in film
 - no mention of racism
 - No reference to political context
 - no reference to racial police violence
 - No stance on the characters
 - Non-western religions referenced
 - Not for a cynical audience
 - Offensive but 'That's McDonagh'
- Offers nothing new to racial discourse
 - Offers something new to genre
 - old-fashioned dynamic
 - One of most important film of the year
- Only white character benefits from relationship
 - optimistic
- overinflated budget and sense of self-importance
 - perfect script
 - personal sensibility
- police brutality macho-sadistic mind games
 - Political Correctness
 - Popular with Black grassroots
 - Positive- actors' performances
 - positive and negatives
 - positive attitude fable
 - Praise for casting
 - Praise for diversity
 - praise for production
 - Praise for white male
 - Praises intensity Director creates
 - praises WSF scene
 - Predictable tropes
- Problems with Hollywood's racial narratives
 - Puts Blackness in context of protagonist
 - Questioning self-identity relatable
 - Race is social construct
 - Race unmarked
 - racial microaggressions
 - Racial progress in America slow
 - Racial/Political Context
 - racism normalized
 - racism trivialized

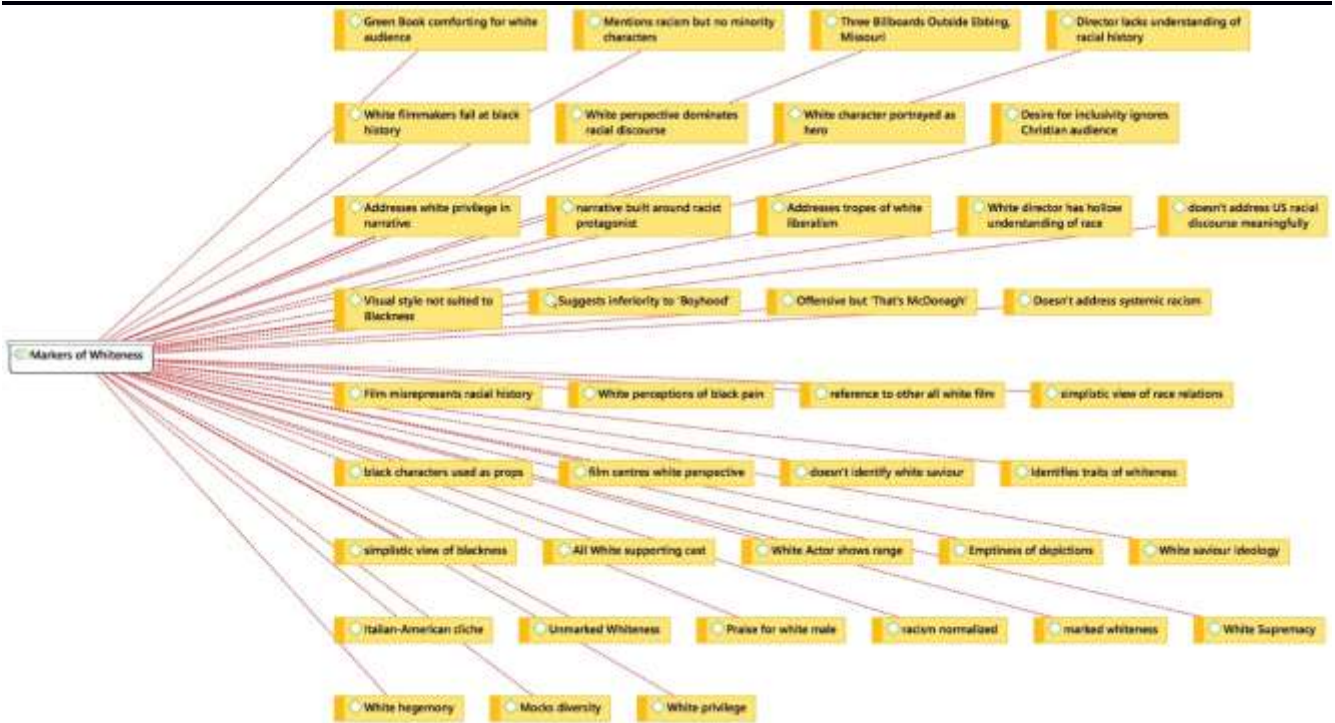
- racist and sexist storytelling tropes
 - racist character praised
 - Radically Earnest
 - Rare significant parts for black women
 - raw and riveting
 - redemption narrative calculated to win awards
 - Reference to other AA film
 - reference to other all white film
 - Reference to Slavery
 - Reference to theatre work - similar content
 - references class
 - References Director's Influences
 - References historic racial archetypes
 - references nazism
 - References Racial Violence
 - references to other films in genre
 - Relatable Black character
 - Relatable story
 - Relates Moonlight to Director's other film
 - Relates own experiences
 - Relevance to LGBTQ community
 - 'rookie mistakes'
 - Satirical film, post-postracial
 - Sceptical of diverse casting
 - Sentimentality is manufactured
 - Simplistic but challenges racial divides
 - simplistic view of blackness
 - simplistic view of race relations
 - slang for 'white people'
 - Societal significance of film
 - Some dramatic characters fictionalized
 - Some White directors get Race right
 - Source Material
 - source material dated
 - Source material takes stronger political stance
 - Standardized narrative
- Story embellished but with no Positive AA character
 - sub-plot gives film a sweetness
 - Subversive
 - Suggests Directors sole focus is Blackness
 - Suggests inferiority to 'Boyhood'
 - Surprisingly emotionally sensitive
 - Sympathy for moderate character
 - Takes away complexity of character
 - Tamir Rice
 - technical criticism
 - Technical criticism of production
 - Technical praise for Director
- the green book not used by black people in film
 - The Odd Couple
 - 'The Police' not the character
 - Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri
 - title misleading
 - Trayvon Martin
 - Tries to be evocative
 - tries to create contradictions
 - Understanding of AA social dynamics
- Unfairly compared to successful diverse films
 - Unmarked blackness
 - Unmarked Whiteness
 - Uses comedy well
 - Visual style not suited to Blackness
 - Visual style praised
 - Waste of time
 - White Actor shows range

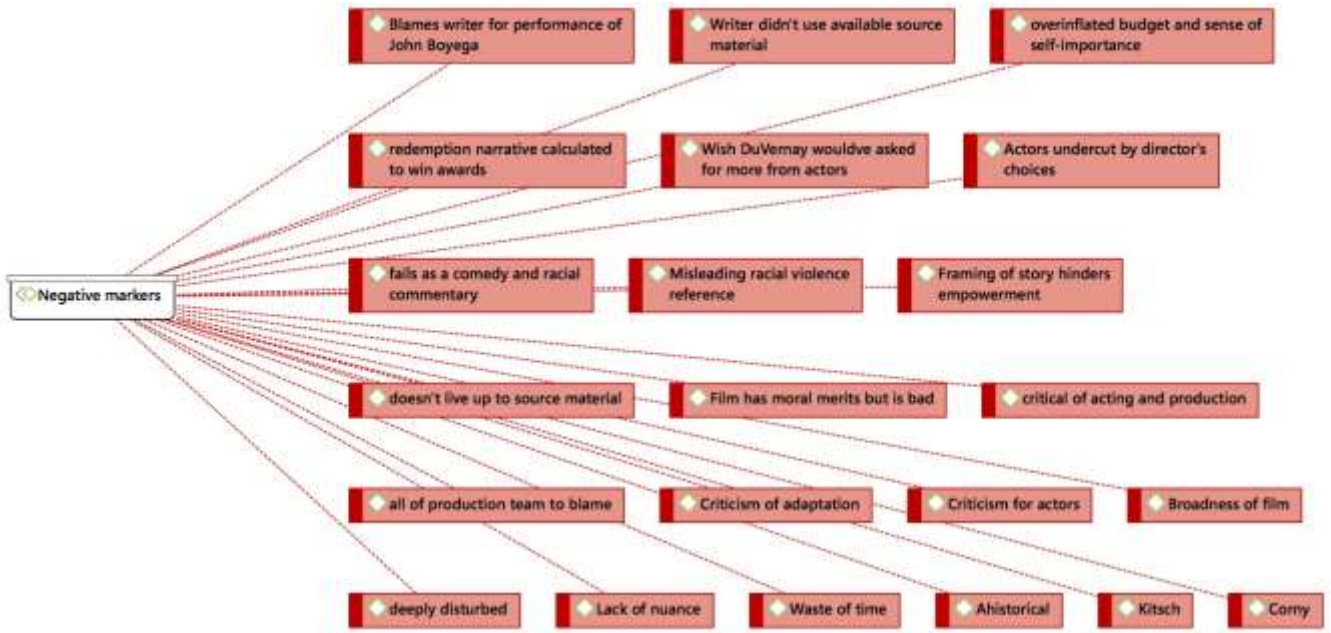
- White character portrayed as hero
 - white characters lack complexity
 - White critic uses personal language
- White director has hollow understanding of race
 - White filmmakers fail at black history
 - White hegemony
 - White perceptions of black pain
- White perspective dominates racial discourse
 - White privilege
 - White saviour ideology
 - White Supremacy
- Wish DuVernay wouldve asked for more from actors
 - Writer & Directors backgrounds
 - Writer didn't use available source material
 - young actors hold their own

6.3 - Coding Group Graphs









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