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“Honoring Black Excellence” social media advertising contribute to black
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movement?”**

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Introduction

M.A. Kevir **Black Lives Matter.** We recognize the immense contribution of the Black community to our success and that of others. We promise to improve our company culture to ensure equity, diversity and opportunity. We understand that the fight against racism is one that must be fought continually and actively. We must and will do better.

Figure 1 - retrieved from <https://www.adidas-group.com/en/media/news-archive/press-releases/2020/message-adidas-board-creating-lasting-change-now/>

This message was part of a press release from the adidas board three days after Black Lives Matter protests peaked on June 6, 2020, when half a million people turned out in nearly 550 places across the United States over the death of George Floyd and others in the United States (Buchanan et al. 2020). It shows that the German sportswear giants directly associated themselves with the social movement which was founded in 2013 in response to the events around the murder of Trayvon Martin. Since then, its mission has been “to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (blacklivesmatter.com). Calls for justice for Trayvon Martin lit the spark for Black Lives Matter in 2013 and the death of Michael Brown a year later brought the movement to national attention (Maqbool 2020).

The adversarial stance that the Trump administration has taken on issues like guns, climate change and immigration has led to more protests than under any other presidency since the Cold War and a deluge of public support from organizations like the NFL and NASCAR for Black Lives Matter may have also encouraged supporters who typically would sit on the sidelines to get involved, which caused a big shift in public opinion about the movement as well as broader support for recent protests (Buchanan et al. 2020). And since the death of George Floyd in police custody on May 25, 2020, not only did public opinion on race, criminal justice and the Black Lives Matter movement leap leftward (Kohn & Quealy 2020: Web), but the nation erupted, more than 23 million people participating in anti-police-brutality protests, potentially making this the largest protest movement in American history, evoking parallels to 1955, when the images of a mutilated Emmett Till helped spark the civil-rights movement (Serwer 2020: Web).

As the Black Lives Matter movement became the center of attention within the American public, many companies chose to take public stances on this social movement in different forms (Schulz 2017: 62) and companies like Twitter,

Citigroup or Ben & Jerry's have aligned themselves with the Black Lives Matter movement. This is remarkable, because of the fact that corporate America has often been wary of conflict, especially in a polarized time, as they have tended to be afraid of offending their customers and associating their brands with sensitive subjects like race. That is why American advertisements often shy away from addressing political issues (Hsu 2020).

One famous exception which has been associated with the Black Lives Matter movement and which has caused a major uproar in the American society has been Nike, when the US sportswear giants on September 3rd, 2018, released an advertisement for their new 30th anniversary "Just Do It" campaign that featured former NFL athlete Colin Kaepernick (Intravia et al. 2020: 1223).

In August 2016, Kaepernick had knelt during a pre-game national anthem, in silent protest against police brutality and in the wake of several high-profile police shootings of unarmed African American men. Dozens of fellow NFL players, of all backgrounds and heritages, followed suit and the protest soon included players from every team in the league. The backlash was swift and severe, with conservative pundits, veterans and president Donald Trump decrying the protests as disrespectful to the American flag and the military (Chadwick & Zipp 2018).

As Intravia et al. point out, the relationship between race and just about any social issue has been and continues to be controversial (2020: 1221) and the intersection of race, athletes, and activism remains front-and-center in the public discourse (Cooper, Macaulay, and Rodriguez 2018 as in Intravia et al. 2020: 1222) until today despite the long history of sports and its actors playing an essential role in social activism for over a half century. Like Kaepernick, African-American athletes from Muhammad Ali's decision to reject the draft for the Vietnam War in 1967 (Lartey 2017 as in Intravia et al. 2020: 1222) to African American athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, raising black-gloved fists during the 1968 medal ceremony in Mexico City in a salute to human rights (Brown 2017 as in Intravia et al. 2020: 1222). Sportswear brands were associated to the events even then, when during their iconic gesture Smith and Carlos were wearing Puma sneakers.

Unsurprisingly, the latest salvo in the debate was launched by Kaepernick's narration of the advert, prompting a social media hashtag urging people to "#BurnYourNikes". Some observers in the US seemed to think that Nike had gone

too far, while the company's share price and brand approval ratings fell, at least, in the short-term (Chadwick & Zipp 2018). Chadwick and Zipp even go as far as stating that Nike reignited a culture war recently by revealing Colin Kaepernick as their spokesperson for the campaign (2018).

Despite the huge backlash in the beginning, the controversy sparked by the commercial centered around identity, motivation and diversity turned out to be marketing gold for the Oregon-based company. Nike's mentions on social media skyrocketed after news of the Kaepernick ad broke. In 24 hours, there were more than 2.7 million references to the brand, according to the analytic firm Talkwalker (Jenkins 2018). The commercial became a viral talking point across all media and ultimately even won an Emmy. As Chadwick and Zipp argue, Nike has clearly been taking advantage of a hot-button social issue to promote their brand, but "commercializing human rights" is a tricky territory, and both ask the question if a global brand like Nike is really supporting a cause without coopting it (2018).

Nike began to face scrutiny over its own ethical record, based on the fact that the brand has made a strategic commitment to equality several years ago, which has made the brand a visible advocate for equality and civil rights, but critical voices counter that this can be seen as an effort to reposition itself as a socially conscious sportswear brand trying to overcome its ties with Lance Armstrong, Oscar Pistorius and Michael Vick and other infamous athletes that have damaged the sportswear giant's image (Chadwick & Zipp 2018). Following Chadwick and Zipp, a cynical ploy to hijack social movements in order to sell shoes.

Given the divisive political climate, questions among stakeholders arose if companies in general, shoe and clothing companies that have ties with the sports world more specifically have moral and ethical obligations to take a clear, positive stance on matter like Black Lives Matter (Boyce 2021: 120). The question would eventually arise e.g. if by doing so, could a marketing campaign such as Nike's could really contribute to the matter and how would this be then achieved.

By stating "If you don't have a multicultural strategy, you don't have a growth strategy", Andrew McCaskill, senior vice president of global communications at Nielsen, underlines the importance of diversity in today's advertising because

significant percentages of millennials and post-millennials say they expect the brands they buy to support social causes (Jenkins 2018). Regarding the new generation of customers, the old assumption and traditional wisdom that companies must avoid activist stances is over (Jenkins 2018).

That of course applies not only to Nike, but also to Adidas, the Americans' strongest competitor for the biggest sportswear brand in the world, who is among the many companies whose mission it is, to go along the zeitgeist and display a high degree of social accountability to itself, its stakeholders, and the public, which is also known as CSR – corporate social responsibility (Fernando 2021). This applies to Adidas' newest campaign "HONORING BLACK EXCELLENCE", an initiative about "acknowledging, appreciating and celebrating Black leaders who are here with us right now, driving change for today and a better tomorrow" (adidas.com/Creating lasting change now), that has been published in February, Black History Month in the United States. The timing seems to underline Adidas' efforts to keep up with the expectations and underline their commitment to the black community and the Black Lives Matter movement.

At the heart of Nike's "Just Do It" campaign featuring Kaepernick was the notion of identity, referring to "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual" (Merriam-Webster). The storyline is all about different characters and personalities and what makes them and their experiences, dreams or accomplishments special or unique. It is fascinating to see how the different identities are portrayed in order to serve the purpose of the story, and how meaning is created in relation to racial, religious or gender identity I.A.

With regard to the Black Lives Matter movement and the political, cultural and social context in the United States, and also in regard to its "successful" competition it seems worth an effort to investigate how black identity is being constructed in Adidas' new "Honoring Black Excellence" marketing campaign and how the video can contribute to the creation of Black identity within the BLM context.

Elliott & Wattanasuwan's (1998: 132) assumption that consumption plays a central role in supplying meanings and values for the creation and maintenance of

the consumer's personal and social world, so that advertising can be recognized as one of the major sources that provide symbolic meanings for an individual in today's world of consumption, will underlie this investigation. As they further point out, cultural meanings are being created by brands and those then can serve as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of an individual's identity, which can be regarded as the foundation of this work.

The following problem statement shall underline the before-mentioned relevance and necessity of the case and problem under investigation:

In times of an increasing awareness of customers for brands' social responsibility approaches and an apparent need for companies to give back to society in times of racial injustice and the growing influence of the Black Lives Matter Movement within the United States, a presentation of awareness for diversity and race is critical and required in any marketing effort. Nike seems to have set the mark with their campaigns around Colin Kaepernick, which had intertwined the concepts of sports, politics, and business. As their main competitor for biggest sports brand in the world, it is intriguing to investigate how Adidas is contributing to black identity construction in its new marketing effort "Honoring Black excellence" (Adidas, 2021) within the BLM contexts, as the campaign is centered around black identity.

The problem formulation reflects societal, theoretical and methodological challenges and therefore reads "How is black identity multimodally portrayed and how can Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" social media campaign contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?"

The events that have caused the rise of the BLM movement are shaping the ways of how the topics of race and black identity are approached in all areas of society, and influence discourses within the United States and beyond. Semioticians Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen define discourses as "[...] socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001: 4). Sindalsen (2020: 12) based on (Jewitt 2014: 27) further describes discourse as "a system of language use and other meaning-making practices that form ways of talking about social reality". Adidas' HBE campaign video has been published through the company's social media channels and combines a variety of

meaning-making practices like images, visuals, texts and music I.A. The study that can be used to disseminate those modes of communication that people use and develop to represent their understanding of the world and to shape power relations with others (Bezemer & Jewitt 2011: 1) is social semiotics, which shall be explained in the theory section. When several semiotic modes are used simultaneously in the design of a semiotic product (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001: 20) a marketing video e.g. there is multimodality, because all modes are perceived to potentially carry equal amounts of meaning, and therefore all modes are, potentially, equally important (Kress 2012: 38).

The fitting means of analysis that pays tribute to the multimodal nature of Adidas' HBE video is multimodal discourse analysis, as the concepts of multimodality and social semiotics are being used in combination to answer questions about meaning and meaning-making by also taking the meaning makers' interests as well as social practices and discourses into account (Kress 2012: 38, Sindalsen 2020: 15).

Within the previous paragraphs, the relevance of Adidas' HBE marketing campaign in relation to black identity construction in the BLM context have been outlined. In order to answer the questions asked in problem formulation however, relevant concepts and notions need to be explained in detail, which will be done in the following section.

Theory

In this theoretical chapter relevant concepts will be conceptualized in detail to create a framework for this research project that is aimed at exploring how black identity is multimodally portrayed and how Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" social media campaign can contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement.

As a starting point and in order to be able to investigate the impact corporate entities can have on black identity construction through advertising, it is necessary to look at how black identity is being constructed in the United States today. So this will be the first task within this theory section.

Contemporary Black Identity development in the United States

Approaches and perspectives on race and identity are constantly evolving in light of social, political, and cultural changes (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 2). In the United States race is a highly salient organizing social construction based on physical appearance (skin color, hair color and texture, facial features), ancestry, nationality, and culture (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 11). It is used for identification—for example, to place individuals into demographic groups for various purposes—and as identity—the meaning individuals and groups ascribe to the membership in a racial category. Identification results from external assignment or categorization, whereas identity results from internal processes as individuals encounter external influences (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 11).

Racial identification and racial identity have a long history in the United States and still today demographic studies of health, living conditions, employment, income, and education still use racial categories as meaningful indicators of differences across social groups. These studies provide evidence that although the notion of race may be socially constructed, membership in different racial groups is related to sometimes radically different life circumstances, experiences, and expectations (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 27). The daily experience of seeing and being seen through the lens of race living as a racialized human being in the United States is affecting many (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 11/12) and makes

race is a meaningful personal identity for many people on an individual and collective level (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 14).

Sociologists focus on an individual's identification with and his/her roles in a social group, as well as on interactions among groups. These investigations might include studies of identity politics, social or group-on-group interactions, and social movements. Sociologists may concentrate less on a pattern of identity development (that is, how an individual moves from one stage of racial identity to another) and more on the forces acting on individuals as they come to understand themselves as racialized people (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 17). Among sociological approaches commonly used to examine the formation of racial identity is symbolic interactionism (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 17), which goes along Jenkins' (1996) statement, under which self-identity must be validated through social interaction. Sociological studies of identity provide an important context for understanding the identity development of individuals, in particular how intergroup relations point to the ways that stereotypes, racism, and privilege shape individual identities (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 18).

The four factors which influence how individuals and groups understand and develop racial identities in the United States in the early twenty-first century are globalization, technology, immigration, and the increasingly multiracial population (Renn in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 25). Social media fall under the technology category, as Renn emphasizes the possibilities of how compelling sounds and videos from around the world can connect people who feel a common bond based on, among other factors, racial identity. The ways in which individuals interact online (in social networking sites, for example) represent further opportunities that technology provides for identity exploration, construction, and representation (see Martínez Alemán and Wartman 2009 as in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 25). This also applies to Adidas' HBE marketing campaign.

In addition to the factors already mentioned, there have been a number of national, global, and environmental events and changes in thinking about social issues and constructions that must be considered when approaching Black identity development in the 21st century (Jackson in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 33).

Natural disasters, such as the aftermath of the Katrina Hurricane, that highlighted the nature of class- and race-based discrimination and unequal treatment affecting hundreds of thousands of lives is one example. The election of former President Barack Obama, which was for many one of the most significant events in this country's history another, because race became front and center in the country's consciousness in ways that they had never been before (Jackson in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 34). The event that had evoked questions like "Is the United States now in a post-racial era?" or "Have we eliminated racism?" had an impact on the way race, racism, and racial identity are thought of, and which perhaps foretell of a future period in which reconceptualizations of race and racial identity will rapidly shift and expand again (Jackson in Wijeyesinghe & Jackson 2012: 34).

In this paragraph two things in particular have been mentioned that have an influence on contemporary black identity construction in the United States: social interaction (especially through social media) and drastic events that affect the society. The unfortunate events that led to the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement can be regarded as such and thus have an impact on all areas of society, including the corporate world. That is why the significance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement for marketing is going to be assessed in the following lines.

The significance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement for marketing

While diverse advertising is becoming increasingly important for marketing (keyword: diversity) it has been unclear what effect the BLM movement has on companies' advertising measures and also how consumers react when companies take a stand on the BLM movement (Hartmann 2020). Until today advertisers have continued to face a dilemma: If they adopt integrated marketing efforts unsure of their tactic, they may alienate a great number of potential buyers; if they do not, they may suffer competitive loss (Gould et al. 1970: 21

Companies have to find their way around the zeitgeist. Brand communication is currently undergoing a profound change (Kamps 2020), because the new generation of customers, millennials and post-millennials not only expect the brands they buy to support social causes (Jenkins 2018: Web), but what they

demand is clear orientation. Because they are more prone to interracial marrying, friendlier to immigration and often want their consumption to have a social component, which separates them from previous generation of buyers (Jenkins 2018: Web), they expect a statement and brands, according to Kamps, should define, position and differentiate themselves (Kamps 2020). Many brands already communicate diversity, empowerment and sustainability and being against racism is now part of good manners (Kamps 2020). But given the divisive political climate, corporate attitudes about addressing racial justice have shifted, particularly in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement (Boyce 2021: 120). Nike's "Don't do it" spot ran in June 2020 and was seen as a very successful political statement from Nike and ensured that politics is no longer regarded as a taboo in marketing communications, also because of the fact that the spot provided the publicity for the "Black Lives Matter" protest on the streets (Kamps 2020).

But experts like Jenkins (2018) do not regard Nike's campaign e.g. as radical, but further as an exploitation of political issues for commercial reasons, as "apparent homage to diversity and social justice" resonate well with the new generation of customers. Andrew McCaskill, senior vice president of global communications at Nielsen, further adds that "if you don't have a multicultural strategy, you don't have a growth strategy" (Jenkins 2018: Web).

So now that the microscope has been placed on various industries' 'version' of diversity and inclusion, and on the level of concern they show for their consumers' wellbeing (outside of the purchase experience) (Boyce 2021: 120), brands are expected to take a clear stance on drastic events that shape society, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement.

So, the significance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement for marketing can be conclusively highlighted in three statements:

BLM puts the black consumer in the spotlight.

BLM puts pressure on corporate entities to act responsibly and to take a standpoint in debated events.

BLM makes companies wanting to represent positive behaviors and to be standing for change.

One popular way in modern society in which companies can address the three above mentioned issues and many more, is through social media. Also because the marketing clip at the center of attention in this project have been published through them, the importance of social media in connection to the corporate world needs to be elaborated on in the next section.

Social Media Marketing

With social media being in the forefront of today's consumption world (Papazolomou & Melanthiou 2012: 326) social media marketing is an integral element of 21st-century business (Rauschnabel et al. 2017: 118). Experts agree that traditional marketing has changed because social media gives the opportunity to marketers to create a buzz about the firm and its products by connecting with people through direct, uncomplicated dialogue (Papazolomou & Melanthiou 2012: 326). Furthermore, the organizational long term success of promotional campaigns and the integration of marketing communications are affected by the effective use of information communication technologies such as social media (Papazolomou & Melanthiou 2012: 319), which are being defined by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations ([CIPR], 2010; Kitchen, 2010) as websites, online tools, and other interactive communication technologies which allow users to interact with each other in some way, either by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, or interests (Papazolomou & Melanthiou 2012: 319).

Characteristic of social media marketing as an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept is, according to Rauschnabel et al. (2017: 123), that it is often based on social media in combination with other communications channels (such as the company's official website or in case of Adidas the video platform YouTube) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders. Moreover, among the specific social media marketing objectives are "stimulating sales, increasing brand awareness, improving brand image, generating traffic to online platforms, reducing marketing costs, and creating user interactivity on platforms" (Rauschnabel et al. 2017: 118).

The rise of social media has changed the balance of power with respect to both the control of a shared reality and the individual's ability to express a brand narrative into an interactional orientation focusing on multilayered interactions

that can cross both venues and media (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007 as in Rauschnabel et al. 2017: 119). The interactional orientation emphasizes multifaceted relationships based on sharing within and between digitally enabled communities (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007 as in Rauschnabel et al. 2017: 119) which provide firms with an opportunity to build relationships with stakeholders and consumers (Rauschnabel et al. 2017: 123) who not only desire but expect brands and their companies to engage with them through social media (Papasolomou & Melanthiou 2012: 320).

To emphasize the role of social media marketing is crucial for this project because the clip appears on different social media channels: the company's official website, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook through the original posting or repostings, through which the videos have the potential to reach and emotionally touch large audiences and by that, achieve valuable effects for the German sportswear giant and its audience. One of the many effects of social media marketing is to influence the participant's reality and they perceive it. This includes someone's own identity and how one perceives oneself in relation to others in society. In the following part social identity theory which refers to defining oneself in terms of various social categories will be addressed.

Social identity theory

The essence of social identity theory is that people do not conform to neatly ascribed categories (e.g., social class), but instead take part in the creation of their own categories (Schouten and McAlexander 1995 as in Underwood et al. 2001: 3). We may categorize ourselves in terms of race, age, gender, religious affiliation, political party, or membership in a professional organization and we define ourselves by the groups with which we affiliate (Tajfel & Turner 1986 as in Harlow & Benbrook 2019: 356 357). According to Phinney (1992), research suggests that race is the most important social category among minority group members (McKinley et al 2014: 14), which bears a special relevance to this project.

Being part of and identifying with a social group affects an individuals' perceptions, cognitions, evaluations, and attributions about issues and events, impacting emotions as well as behaviors (Underwood et al. 2001: 3).

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The development of an individual self-identity is inseparable from the parallel development of collective social identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 133). This problematic relationship has been described as the internal-external dialectic of identification by Jenkins (1996), who maintains that self-identity must be validated through social interaction and that the self is embedded in social practices (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 133), like interaction through social media platforms, and which goes along the nature of social semiotics which will be touched upon later. As a result, perceptions of belonging to a group result in enhanced identification with the group and consequently the features associated with that group guide one's attitudes and behaviors (McKinley et al 2014: 2; Underwood et al. 2001: 3) and an individual is being enabled to vicariously partake in group accomplishments (Katz and Kalm 1966 as in Underwood et al. 2001: 3).

Black Lives Matter is about fostering social change in regard to the situation of Black people in the United States and the sense of Black identity and the group's image is equally at focus as the individuals' identification and solidarity with the group. In that relation, Tajfel and Turner (1979) identified three identity management strategies to improve a social identity: individuals can (1) seek to change group affiliation from a devalued group to a group with a higher social status, (2) work together to redefine and improve perceptions of the group, and (3) collectively implement social change strategies to change the social standing of the group (Harlow & Benbrook 2019: 356/357).

When fostering social change, social movement research suggests that group identification is crucial for creating solidarity and commitment and in turn sparking collective action (Snow & Benford, 1992 as in Harlow & Benbrook 2019: 356/357) because an individuals' desire to maintain positive ingroup status is enhanced by the personal relevance of the particular ingroup to one's identity such that the greater the degree of identification one has with an ingroup (i.e., race/ethnicity), the more motivated one will be to protect the status and

interests of that group (Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004 as in McKinley et al 2014: 2).

The role especially social media can play for companies as been outlined earlier.

In this section it has been touched upon how social identity can be shaped and that particularly in regard to group dynamics like those who are fostered in various forms by BLM, it can be a complex process. Taking into consideration the growing amount of media exposure every individual is exposed to on a daily basis, the process of social identity formation becomes even more complex, that is why this connection is being touched upon in the next paragraph.

Social identity and the media

The need for quality depictions of one's ingroup in the media and social media appears to be so important that audiences may actively reject and select media content in order to manage social identity needs and protect perceptions of group vitality (Abrams & Giles, 2007 as in McKinley et al 2014: 3). However, although these representations may reinforce certain stereotypical perceptions, the favorable portrayals of celebrities (e.g., applauded for their achievements, promoted rather than criticized) are likely to be perceived by viewers as successful and possessing numerous desirable attributes (McKinley et al 2014: 3). In particular, prior research suggests that the effective use of celebrity endorsers I.A. underscores how these individuals serve as a symbolic reference group one wishes to aspire to (Lafferty, Goldsmith & Newell, 2002 as in McKinley et al 2014: 3).

Furthermore, the question arises if brands themselves can serve as opinion leaders, as opinion leaders are crucial to the construction of social and cultural identity, as they influence others' attitudes and behaviors (Marshall 1997 as in Harlow & Benbrook 2019: 357), potentially influencing how individuals perceive the groups to which they belong (Harlow & Benbrook 2019: 357).

Social identity and brands

Endeavors to create the consumer's self-identity often involve the consumption of products, services and media, and there is always a tension between the meanings we construct for ourselves and those we are exposed to socially. This dialectical

tension requires active negotiation of meaning (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 133).

From a marketing perspective, Underwood et al. (2001) presents social identity as a mechanism for tapping the emotional connection between the consumer and the service brand and thus draw a connection between social identity theory and the corporate world. They argue that strong service brands are built by making an emotional connection with their audience and that this connection is achieved by brands that reflect customers' core values, that "capture and communicate values that customers hold dear" (Berry 2000, p. 34 as in Underwood et al. 2001: 1).

Social identity theory is concerned with "the part of the individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1982 as in Underwood et al. 2001: 2). Brands know to the extent that customers incorporate identification with a service into their self-concepts, illustrated by high levels of personal commitment and emotional involvement which provide huge opportunities for companies to build brand equity which Keller (1993) defines as when "the consumer has a high level of awareness and familiarity with the brand and holds some strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in memory" (Underwood et al. 2001: 1,4). One variable found to strengthen brand associations according to Underwood et al. (2001:4) is the degree of personal relevance, meaning that individuals identifying highly with a service provider are likely to view brand-related information as personally relevant, thus process it deeply, and consequently relate it to existing brand knowledge, ultimately resulting in strengthened brand associations (Keller 1998 as in Underwood et al. 2001: 4).

A basic premise of customer-based brand equity is that the power of a brand resides in the minds of consumers, resulting from both lived (i.e., purchase and usage) and mediated experiences (i.e., advertising and promotion) with the brand (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998). Through these experiences, brands may serve as symbolic resources for the construction of self-identity. Brands may reflect specific values or traits that one considers central to their identity. The

consumption of such products or services provides a sense of self-definition and serves to communicate that definition to others. Development of a social identity involves building more elaborate knowledge structures and amassing experiences that are foundational to forming attitudes and opinions (Keller 1993 as in Underwood et al. 2001: 4).

Elliott & Wattanasuwan (1998: 135) note that central to today's postmodernist consumer society is the recognition that the consumer does not make consumption choices solely from products' utilities but also from their symbolic meanings (Belk, 1988; Bourdieu, 1994; Dittmar, 1992; Douglas, 1982; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959; McCracken, 1988 as in Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 135). The functions of the symbolic meanings of products and brand services including marketing efforts operate in two directions: outward in constructing the social world, social-symbolism; and inward in constructing our self-identity, self-symbolism (Elliott, 1997 as in Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 135). As consumption plays a central role in supplying meanings and values for the creation and maintenance of the consumer's personal and social world, advertising is recognized as one of the major sources of these symbolic meanings. These cultural meanings are transferred to brands, and it is brands that are often used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity (McCracken, 1987; Mick and Buhl, 1992 as in Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 135).

Social Identity and Advertising

One concept that bridges the gap between brands, media and the consumer is advertising, that is why it is important to mention the importance of advertising at this point because ultimately the goal of any company is to make sales and advertising is an established means to achieve such a goal. But in regard to this project it is important to emphasize that advertising can also be used as a symbolic resource for the construction of narratives to give sense to an individual's life history and personal situation as a mediated experience (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 132,135).

A mediated experience is an outcome of a mass-communication culture and the consumption of media products and involves the ability to experience events that

are spatially and temporally distant from the practical context of daily life (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 135). It is recontextualized experience in that it allows the experience of events that transpire far away and will vary widely in its relevance to the self as the individual can draw selectively on mediated experience and interlace it with his/her own lived experience to construct the self (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 135).

As part of a cultural system, advertising is viewed as a guideline to map out all aspects of the consumer's existence (Ritson and Elliott, 1995); on the other hand, all aspects of the consumer's existence are also guidelines to map out advertising creativity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 135). The relationship between advertising and the consumer is dialectical: advertising not only helps in creating, modifying, and transforming cultural meanings for the consumer (Lannon and Cooper, 1983), but also represents cultural meanings taken from the consumer's world view and invested into the advertised product. This dialectical relationship drives a cyclical flow of symbolic meanings derived from culture and transferred into the semiotic world of advertising, then interpreted and used by consumers to construct internally their self-concept and externally their social world (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 135/136)

As part of the external construction of an individual's life world the meaning returns back to its original starting point, as Ritson and Elliott (1995 as in Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 136) put it "the mass of flowing meanings that represents culture". Thus, advertising is both a means to transfer or create meanings into culture and a cultural product itself (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 136).

Although advertisers aim to create particular meanings for their brands in advertising, meanings interpreted by the consumer may be varied and diverse based on the nature of social semiotics. There is growing recognition that the consumer is an active and participating audience (for example, Anderson and Meyer, 1988; Livingstone, 1995; Mick and Buhl, 1992; O'Donohoe, 1994 as in Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 136). The consumer may attend only to certain messages and interpret or make sense of the meanings according to her/his personal perception (Lannon 1992) and her/his social knowledge (Livingstone,

1995). The meaning of a particular advertisement is not given within the advertisement itself, for as Anderson and Meyer (1988) point out: 'meaning is not delivered in the communication process, rather it is constructed within it' (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 136) which underlies the necessity of multimodal discourse analysis to decipher the variety of ways in which meaning is created in advertising.

Advertising meanings, as they are described, discussed, argued about, laughed at (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 137) can be used to establish and communicate some of the fundamental cultural categories such as social status, gender, age, race and cultural values like family, tradition and authenticity according to McCracken (1993 as in Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 139).

Furthermore, brands can acquire deep meaning for consumers by their involvement in the socialization process, so the process beginning during childhood by which individuals acquire the values, habits, and attitudes of a society (Merriam-Webster), and from then on brands can evoke profound feelings of nostalgia and provide comfort from insecurity by providing a narrative structure for concretizing emotional meanings (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 140).

Elliott & Wattanasuwan (1998: 141) conclude that in today's postmodern consumer culture individuals are engaged in a constant task of negotiating meanings from lived and mediated experience as they endeavor to construct and maintain their identity. As part of the resources for this task they utilize the symbolic meanings of consumer good and the brand who produce those and through an understanding of the dynamics of the process of identity construction, opportunities can be identified for brands to play an important role in the symbolic project of the self (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 141).

Methodology

The methodology section is divided into the six segments epistemology, ontology, research design, data collection, data analysis and delimitations, in order to demonstrate how the chosen problem will be approached and consequently critically examined. The questions of what is being done, how it is being done and why it is being done are central at this point in order to place this project in an academic tradition.

The first two sections, epistemology and ontology, are intended to clarify the philosophical standpoints which underlie this work to establish at the outset the why, how and for what purpose this research project is being undertaken (Lamont 2015: 24). The overall strategy to achieve the goals set for this project shall be explained under research design. Furthermore important concepts the research design is built upon such as social semiotics, meaning making in visual communication and multimodality are being introduced. Within the data collection section the process of accurately gathering information to ensure reliable data that allow for an analysis which can answer the questions posed in the introduction is going to be explained. The data analysis part describes the method used to extract information from the collected data to answer the research question. Finally the delimitations section is intended to help classify and validate the methodological choices made during this project.

Epistemological Considerations

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and the study of knowledge and knowledge production (Lamont 2015: 25) and addresses the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline (Bryman 2012: 27). Social constructivism is the epistemological choice underlying this project for the following reasons:

The terms constructivism and social constructionism tend to be used interchangeably and subsumed under the generic term 'constructivism' (Andrews 2012: 3). While constructivism refers to the process by which reality is created by the observer (Van Niekerk 2005: 61), social constructionism has a social rather than an individual focus (Young & Colin, 2004 as in Andrews 2012: 3). The origins of social constructionism can be traced in part to an interpretivist approach to

thinking, which focuses on the processes by which meanings are created, negotiated, sustained and modified (Schwandt 2003 as in Andrews 2012: 3).

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Social identity construction has been introduced in the theory section and a social constructivist epistemology captures the process of the internal-external dialectic of identification by Jenkins (1996) because reality and the understanding of oneself and someone's own identity are created internally by the observer, but they are constantly shaped and validated through social interaction so much that the self is embedded in social practices. This captures the importance of an individual's interaction with others, for example through social media which is an essential part of people's social interactions today, and for an individual's creation of both reality and the self.

Social constructivism is further important for this research project, because from a social constructionist perspective, language is more than just a way of connecting people. People 'exist' in language. Consequently the focus is not on the individual person but rather on the social interaction in which language is generated, sustained, and abandoned (Gergen & Gergen, 1991 as in Van Niekerk 2005: 63/64). Furthermore, Berger and Luckman (cited in Speed 1991: 400) state that people socially construct reality by their use of agreed and shared meaning communicated through language (Van Niekerk 2005: 64). Thus, our beliefs about the world are social inventions (Van Niekerk 2005: 63/64) shaped by the interaction with others, which justifies the choice of a discourse approach for the analysis.

Following social constructionism, a great emphasis is placed on everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality, thus the social practices people engage in serve as the focus of enquiry in this project (Andrews 2012: 3) through investigating the intersection of social media, advertisement and identity construction. This is relevant, because from a social constructionist perspective meaning is located "in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social, community context" (Dickerson and Zimmerman 1996: 80 as in Van Niekerk 2005: 64). Social constructionists are especially interested in the normative narratives, or grand narratives, which are formed by and in turn influence people, and against which people measure themselves and Anderson and Goolishian (cited in Hart 1995:

184), add that “[w]e live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories and self-descriptions” (as in Van Niekerk 2005: 64). In today’s consumer society, companies have an influential role in how people understand the world because through advertising, marketing, the media and social media they present us with narratives that determine of how we see ourselves and the world.

According to Doan (cited in Rapmund 2000) social constructionists are interested in accounts that honor and respect the community of voices inherent in each individual and how these accounts can be respected within a particular system and by that, addresses the aim of this project, to deconstruct stories that dominate others (Dickerson and Zimmerman: 1996) in regard to racial identity (Van Niekerk 2005: 67). In relation to the aim of this project to explore how racial identity is being built and how corporate entities like Adidas can contribute to it through advertising, relations between some concepts and theories identified in theory section need to be spelled out at this point with regard to the epistemological considerations.

In the theory section the importance of brands, advertising and social media and furthermore the narratives that are created by brands to create a deeper emotional connection with its consumers have been explained. The social constructivist epistemology offers me as the researcher a way, through a multimodal discourse perspective, to deconstruct the narratives within Adidas’ HBE video analytically and investigate how those narratives can add to the discussion and shape the contemporary notion of black identity within the American society. This is possible because social media makes up a huge part of people’s daily interaction through which they gain their understanding of themselves and reality. The stories and representations, also created by corporate entities who take roles as social actors influence how users who are confronted with them on social media on a regular basis make sense of the experiences that make up their reality.

Ontological Considerations

Because the meanings of society are variable and contested (Scales 2013: 4), the underlying ontology, which is the branch of philosophy, which is concerned with being and with what exists, needs to be explained. “It considers what types of things there are in the world and what ‘parts’ or ‘substances’ the world can be divided into” (McQueen and McQueen 2010: 151 as in Scales 2013: 2). Framed differently, ontology sets the frame of how we view a particular aspect of reality as a variety of aspects that form the world around us. This research paper is located within the social sciences, therefore the aim of choosing a particular ontology is to explore how the particular aspect of “social reality”, racial identity, is being constructed by e.g. the debates that are centered around it, like the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States and corresponding marketing efforts. Taking into account the active involvement of people in discourse and meaning making interaction, and therefore in reality construction, constructionism has to be the ontological choice this project is being built up upon, because it asserts that social phenomena, categories, and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors and it implies that they are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision (Bryman 2012: 33). Potter (1996: 98) observes that the “world [...] is constituted in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it” (as in Bryman 2012: 34) and the role that social media, advertising and brands play in the construction of the consumers’ realities cannot be overemphasized and was therefore further explained in the theory section. The constructivist ontological stance, assuming that each individual is constantly creating his/her own version of reality goes in line with the nature of discourse and the role an individual is assigned by the negotiation of meaning. The constructivist ontology is related to the problem formulation of how black identity is multimodally portrayed and how Adidas’ “Honoring Black Excellence” social media campaign can contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement because the nature of discourse and meaning making imply that a particular aspect of the social reality e.g. the racial identity of an individual, e.g. the viewer of the two commercials, is subjective and can and is being constantly negotiated by the interaction with other social actors. This means that it is assumed that brands like Adidas act as social actors and thus shape an individuals’ own perception of

his/her racial identity through discourse in the form of multimodal advertising that is inspired by what happens within society, in regard to race the context of the Black Lives Matter movement. The aim of this project is to investigate how the German brand creates meaning in regard to the societal aspect of racial identity and how this could be interpreted from the viewer's perspective.

Having outlined the philosophical standpoints which underlie this work, it is crucial to determine the research design this project should inherit to make sure the goal of exploring how Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" social media campaign can contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement can be achieved.

Research Design

The research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data; therefore, the chosen research design reflects decisions about what priority is being given to a range of dimensions within the research process (Bryman 2012: 46) and also the strategy to guarantee the academic quality.

As previously explained, the discourse approach and more specifically the multimodal discourse analysis are of central importance to this project because multimodal discourse analysis provides the means to systematically work with multimodal data as they occur in videos like Adidas' "HONORING BLACK EXCELLENCE".

Within the theory section the focus has been set on social identity construction, the relevance of Black Lives Matter and on various communicative aspects that are central to this research like marketing and advertising. What is missing so far however, is an explanation of how communication, more specifically discourse as a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts (Merriam-Webster) works. Therefore and because the research design for this project is based on multimodal discourse analysis, the concepts of social semiotics, meaning making in visual communication and multimodality will be introduced. This is important because the concept of multimodality serves this project both as a theoretical concept as well as a

methodological means to analyze the collected data in order to answer the research question.

Social Semiotics

As this research project is located at the intersection of racial identity construction and advertising it is crucial to understand that meaning in regard to e.g. identity is never fixed, but rather constantly constructed and re-constructed between social actors. Words or images do not inherit a fixed meaning but could mean different things for each viewer. The study that is concerned with that ambiguity of meaning is social semiotics, the study of meaning making, which contributes to this research because the value of this project will be that every detail that creates meaning will be paid attention to. Social semiotics studies the media of dissemination and the modes of communication that people use and develop to represent their understanding of the world and to shape power relations with others (Bezemer & Jewitt 2011: 1).

It draws on qualitative, fine-grained analysis of records of meaning making, such as 'artifacts', 'texts', and 'transcripts', to examine the production and dissemination of discourse across the variety of social and cultural contexts within which meaning is made (Bezemer & Jewitt 2011: 1).

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 13), who are responsible for the modern take on social semiotics, the following assumptions are critical about social semiotics in regard to multimodality:

Communication requires that participants make their messages maximally understandable in a particular context. They therefore choose forms of expression which they believe to be maximally transparent to other participants. It is intriguing to investigate how global sports brands like Adidas package their messages multimodally in relation to race to make their standpoints maximally understandable to their audience.

On the other hand, communication takes place in social structures which are inevitably marked by power differences, and this affects how each participant understands the notion of 'maximal understanding'. Participants in positions of power can force other participants into greater efforts of interpretation opposite to participants who, through lack of command of the representational system,

produce messages that are harder to interpret (e.g. children, learners of a foreign language) (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 13). Successful companies like Adidas or Nike are masters in knowing their customers and to seduce them effectively through the media and beyond, but anyhow, representation requires that sign-makers choose forms for the expression of what they have in mind, forms which they see as most apt and plausible in the given context. The interest of sign-makers, at the moment of making the sign, leads them to choose an aspect or bundle of aspects of the object to be represented as being criterial, at that moment, for representing what they want to represent, and then choose the most plausible, the most apt form for its representation (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 13). To be put simply, socially constructed knowledge is being developed in a specific social context in a way which is appropriate to the interests of social actors in that context (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 4 as in Elorza 2014: 265). That is the delicateness of this project because in the context of Black Lives Matter pressure is put on companies to conform with customer expectations, but to still display a high level of uniqueness to separate them from their competition and to appear credible.

For Kress and van Leeuwen, meanings expressed by speakers, writers, printmakers, photographers, designers, painters and sculptors are first and foremost social meanings (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 20). In relation to the aim of investigating Adidas' HBE video in regard to black identity, they recognize that societies are not homogeneous, but composed of groups with varying and often contradictory interests, which will be reflected in the messages produced by individuals, and which will reflect the differences, incongruities and clashes which characterize social life. In their experience it is often the case, that the different modes through which texts are constructed show these social differences, so that in a multimodal text using images and writing the writing may carry one set of meanings and the images carry another. As an example Kress and van Leeuwen mention that in an advertisement, for instance, it may be that the verbal text is studiously 'non-sexist', while the visual text encodes overtly sexist stereotypes (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 20). Uncovering those hidden and subtle meanings will be at heart of this project

Meaning making in visual Communication

This section is important for this project because it clarifies how meaning is negotiated between the producer of the video and the audience in multimodal discursive resources like the video at hand which relies heavily on visualities. As outlined in the previous section, meaning making is created through and along the interaction between social actors, who will be presented in the following lines.

In visual communication there is a three-way interaction between the interactive participants (the people who communicate with each other through images, the producers and viewers of images) and represented participants (the people, the places and things depicted in images) (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 114). The first interaction happens between represented participants, so everything that happens within a video e.g. The second between interactive and represented participants, so how the interactive participants react and feel towards the represented participants. The third interaction happens between the interactive participants, so the things interactive participants do to or for each other through images (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 114).

Interactive participants are therefore real people who produce and make sense of images in the context of social institutions which to different degrees and in different ways regulate what may be 'said' with images, how it should be said, and how it should be interpreted (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 114). With online media, this process can be tricky, because the viewer does not get to know the producer and vice-versa, the producer can never really know their vast and absent audiences (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 114). If producers, if they want to see their work disseminated, must work within more or less rigidly defined conventions, and adhere to the more or less rigidly defined values and beliefs of the social institution within which their work is produced and circulated. Viewers will at least recognize these communicative intentions and these values and attitudes for what they are, even if they do not ultimately accept them as their own values and beliefs (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 115). The relation between producer and viewer through visual media is therefore represented, because in contrast to face-to-face communication, viewers are not obliged to respond. Viewers are imaginarily rather than really put in the position of the friend, the lay person who must defer to the expert. And whether or not the viewer will identify

with that position will depend other factors – on someone's relation to the producer or the institution he or she represents, and someone's relation to the others who form part of the context of reception, on social media platforms other followers e.g. All the same, whether or not we identify with the way we are addressed, we do understand how we are addressed, because we do understand the way images represent social interactions and social relations (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 116).

The concept where meaning is being negotiated in the same way as in pure visual communication is multimodality, where more than one semiotic resource interact to create meaning multimodally is going to be addressed in the following section.

Multimodality

The combination of numerous semiotic modes such as images, sounds and text I.A. make up the richness of modern marketing videos and is called multimodality. Multimodality is an interdisciplinary approach that understands communication and representation to be more than about language. Multimodality further assumes that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which contribute to meaning (Bezemer 2012).

The approach has been developed to systematically address much-debated questions about changes in society, for instance in relation to new media and technologies (Bezemer 2012). Through the development of television, the computer and the internet, sounds and images e.g. are taking over tasks associated originally with the role of language in multimodal meaning making (Iedema 2003:33).

Due to more and more complex social and cultural discourse practices thanks to social media and globalized marketing in areas like the multimedia production the 'what goes with what' and 'what can signify what' are constantly challenged and changing (Iedema 2003:38) which makes multimodal resources interesting objects to analyze in regard to uncover how meaning is created through the combination of various resources. Hereby researchers have to keep in mind, that multimodality is founded on the presumption that all communicational acts are shaped by the norms and rules that exist in society operating at the moment of sign making, and

most importantly influenced by the motivations and interests of people in a specific social context (Bezema 2021).

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This project is built upon a qualitative research design with the aim to analyze Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" which forms the data corpus, in detailed and intensive fashion to explore and display the complexities that arise from being located at the interplay of marketing, corporate social responsibility, racial identity construction and the BLM movement. The ramifications that come from the multimodal nature of the video further calls for a qualitative approach that relies upon the collection of, and analysis of non-numeric data in order to better understand how individuals make sense of the world around them (Lamont 2015: 78). In qualitative fashion, this project shall provide an in-depth study of the video through multimodal discourse analysis. As outlined in the philosophical assumptions, the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular are rejected in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world and the role language plays in this process, as qualitative research embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation (Bryman 2012: 36).

As often in qualitative research, inductive reasoning describes the relationship between theory and research in this project, because the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories out of the empirical observations made (Bryman 2008: 366 as in Lamont 2015: 78) through exploring the topic instead of testing an existing theory on its validity.

Multimodal discourse analysis is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound (O'Halloran 2011: 1) therefore it can be used as a means for the analysis of multimodal" (or "multisemiotic") phenomena based on an inter-disciplinary approach that understands communication and representation to be more than about language (Bezemer 2012). Multimodal discourse analysis puts a special focus on the relationships between the different semiotics, and on the 'division of labor' between them in particular representations (Iedema 2003:48), and the

assumption that multimodal discourse analysis can account for these complexities involved in advertising underlies its relevance for this project (Elorza 2014: 263).

Data Collection

Among the first steps of this research was to collect the data fitting for answering the research question. Within this section the process of gathering information to ensure reliable data that allow for an analysis is being explained.

Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" has been purposefully chosen in order to investigate the historical dimension of the impact that BLM has on social media advertising of one of the two leading players in the sportswear market, who is additionally deeply embedded in the global consumer culture. The HBE video therefore serves as primary source document. This decision was based on the principle of purposive sampling, in which the researcher aims to sample material in a strategic way, so that the collected data are relevant to the research questions that are being posed (Bryman 2012: 714). The selected video is relevant because most importantly, the marketing effort is dedicated to the black community and black individuals are at the focus of attention through the entirety of the clip. Second of all, the video is relevant because it fits into the context of Black Lives Matter as outlined in the theory section, and furthermore the spot appears on social media, is produced and shared by a corporate entity, and maybe more importantly the video aims at establishing a connection between black identity and the sportswear brand.

The HBE video has additionally been selected based on its temporal, historic dimension as it was released in February of this year, in times when activities around Black Lives Matter often even exceed heated discussions. It is further intriguing to see how Adidas responds to its biggest competitor who arguably set the standard in political marketing related to the Black Lives Matter movement.

There is a screenshot of Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" clip how it appears on one of the company's Instagram accounts in typical social media fashion below.

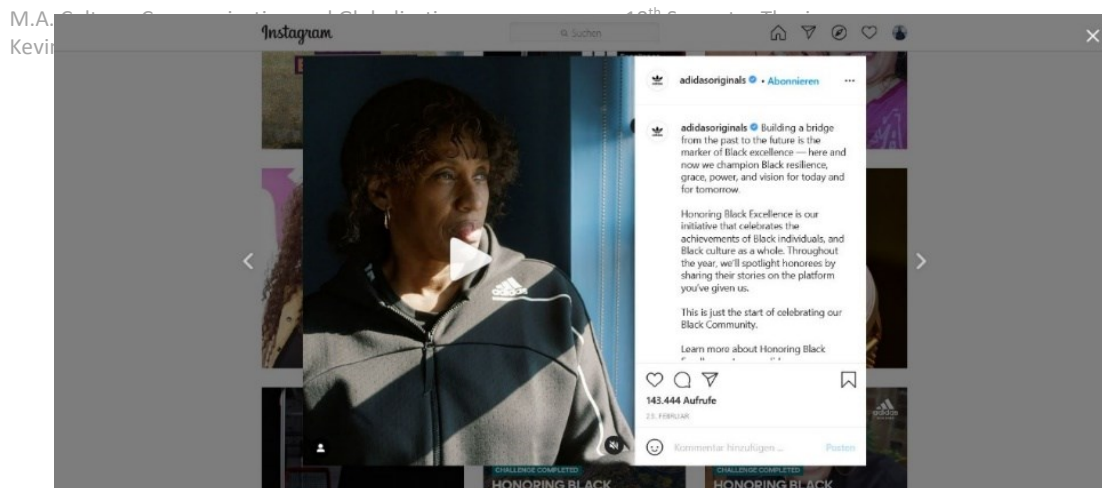


Figure 2 - A screenshot from Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" from one of the company's Instagram accounts (https://www.instagram.com/p/CLo_zjbBemA/)

Adidas' "HBE" clip is also embedded on the company's American official website [adidas.com](https://www.adidas.com), where the initiative is being introduced. The video there appears in the typical YouTube format, from where screenshots are taken for the analysis because of practical reasons. The format of the video is different on Instagram than on YouTube, but one can see that the content was being created to fit both platforms' style and size.

The "HBE" initiative which was published on Feb. 23, 2021, and according to Adidas, is dedicated to recognizing the achievements of Black individuals year-round, the pivotal role of the Black community and acknowledging the fact that there is no picture of sport, culture, or adidas without the Black community (see [adidas.com](https://www.adidas.com)).

Honorees from different sports and regions "from Compton to Atlanta", who are also the protagonists of the video of interest, will be highlighted throughout the year ([adidas.com](https://www.adidas.com)) and are to be introduced later in the analysis.

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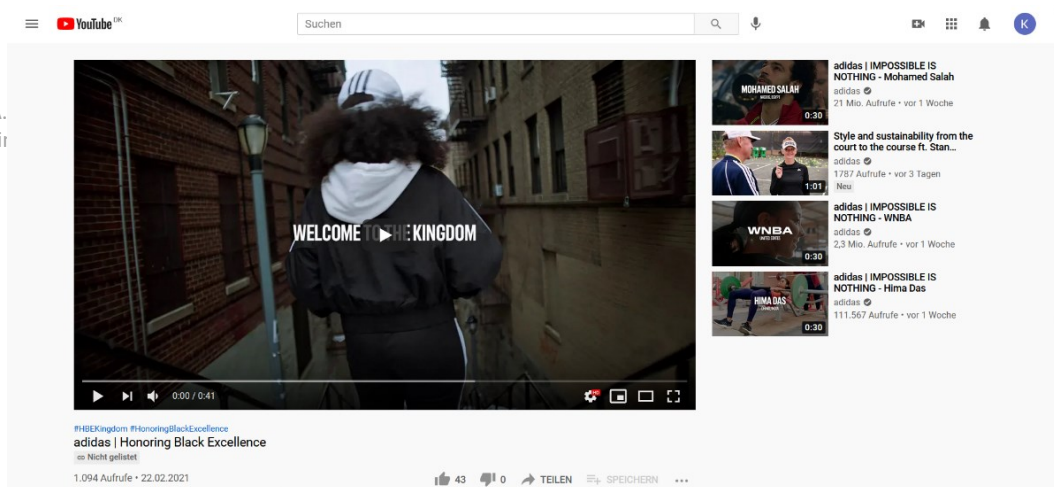


Figure 3 - A screenshot from Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" from Adidas' YouTube account (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3id3xTc56w>)

The video itself has received noticeable attention on Instagram as it was posted first by Adidas' two official accounts adidas and adidasoriginals through which it has accumulated a combined 253.879 views (status 05/09/2021) but also through various reposts from various Adidas subdivisions like Adidas Basketball or the Adidas New York City branch or other followers of course, which underlies the relevance of this marketing video in regard to this research.

Having addressed the data collection, it is important to address how the video and is going to be analyzed in systematic fashion to answer the question of "How is black identity multimodally portrayed and how can Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" social media campaign contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?"

Data analysis

So next, it will be described how the clip will be divided into smaller data pieces to reveal the complexities that make up the richness of Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" by looking at one particular data piece, which is going to be examined in detail, at a time.

Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" has a total length of 41 seconds and is made up of 33 individual frames that form the video. A data piece may consist of two or more frames depending on content wise coherence, e.g. the same actor within one sequence. As already mentioned, the videos have been watched on the video platform YouTube and frames consist of screenshots of the video as it appears on this platform have been taken to be used in this project. The links to the video is provided in the appendix. The following is an example for a data piece from Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence":



Figure 4 - The data piece shows the sequence 00:08 - 00:09 from Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence"

For Adidas' "HBE" twelve data pieces have been identified and will be analyzed in detail.

Through narrowing the scope of analysis into smaller data pieces, tribute shall be paid to the notion of semiotics to disseminate the modes of communication such as images, sounds and text i.a. to their smallest units of meaning to uncover how meaning is created semiotically. So, after providing a brief description of the data piece/sequence, each data piece is going to be analyzed in relation to the semiotic categories visuals/images, sounds/music, colors, text and action/gesture to trace the meaning making to the smallest level. Those categories have been chosen because each before-mentioned semiotic resource is acknowledged to have high functionality within multimodal discourse (O'Halloran 2008: 445). To clarify, that does not mean to focus on one mode at a time only, but first to look at one mode at a time to trace the smallest meaning unit and then, recognizing the fact that those smallest units of meaning, lower-level mediated actions according to Norris, are never produced alone and always interact with other modes and that quite often, these lower-level mediated actions are chained together in actions and interactions and are intricately interlinked with other chains of lower-level mediated actions (Norris 2019: 41), the coming together of the different semiotic

modes or lower-level mediated actions to create meaning multimodally is being analyzed in an additional category in regard to every data piece. This shall guarantee a systematic analysis to explore the meaningfulness of each mode individually, but also the meaning making that takes place across different modalities in combination, which makes up the complexity and richness of multimodal resources like Adidas “Honoring Black Excellence”.

In the analysis, special attention shall be paid to how the combination of various multimodal resources is being influenced by the motivations and interests of Adidas as a social actor within the specific social context of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Also the analysis design shall guarantee the display of the multimodal intricacies in systematic fashion, demonstrating how meaning is created, and to support the goal of exploring how “How black identity is multimodally portrayed and how Adidas’ “Honoring Black Excellence” social media campaign can contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?”

After the analysis has been finished, in the discussion part at the end of the analysis section, findings will be discussed in relation to the concepts and theories that have been presented within the theory section.

Delimitations

Within the previous methodology section, the methodological choices as well as philosophical standpoints that underlie this project have been laid out in a detail so that the issues of replication and reliability, which guarantee the academic quality of this work, are being dispelled (Bryman 2012: 46/47).

Part of setting high research standards especially in regard to the notions of identity construction and negotiation of meaning is reflecting critically about the notion of objectivity and how to guarantee it. In this project the multimethod approach of triangulation to data collection and data analysis is used, because the concept of triangulation states that phenomena under study within qualitative research can be understood best when approached with a variety or a combination of research methods (Rothbauer 2008). Multimodal discourse analysis serves as means to connect theory and analysis by combining different

concepts with the data collected. This triangulative strategy to include different theories and concepts allows me as a researcher to identify, explore, and understand different dimensions of how black identity is multimodally portrayed and how Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" social media campaign can contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Analysis

Within this section the data collected shall be analyzed in order to answer the research question of “How is black identity multimodally portrayed and how does Adidas’ “Honoring Black Excellence” social media advertising contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?”

Adidas provides the following description next to the video on Instagram:

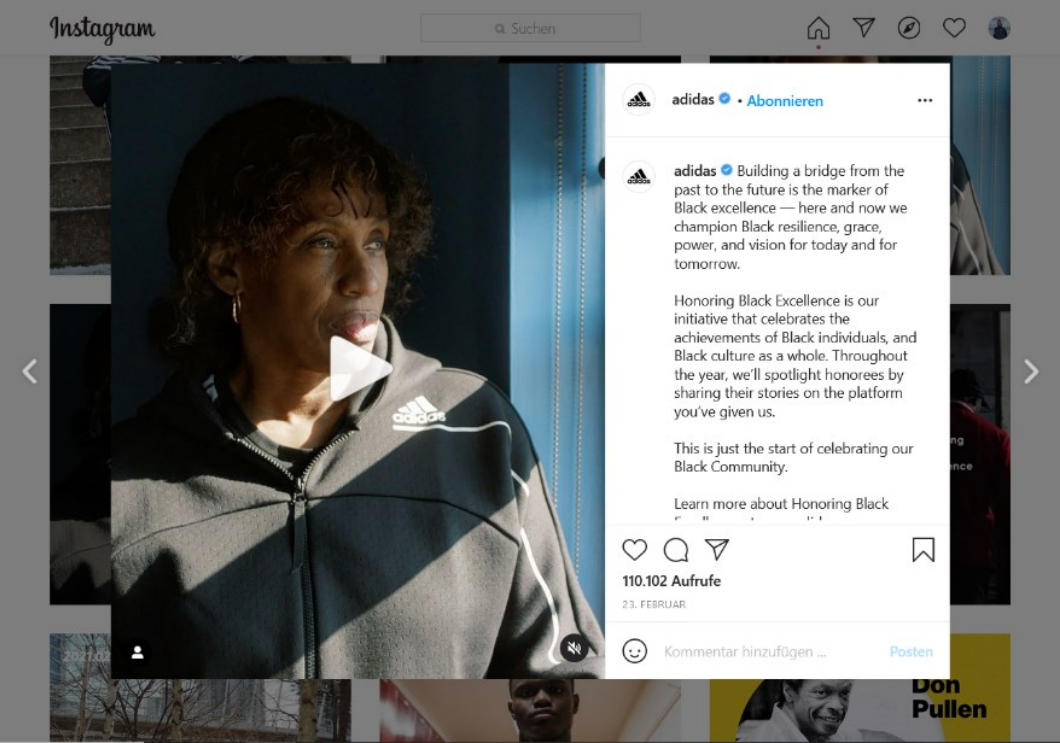
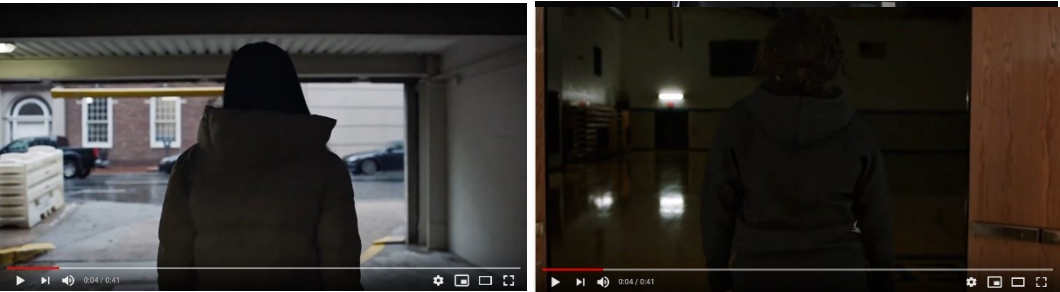


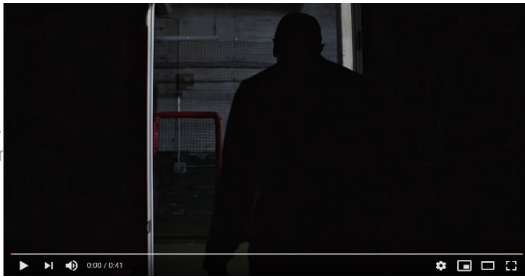
Figure 5 - retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/CLo_sOOnsr/

With the description Adidas sets the tone of what to expect when watching the video: expression of Black “resilience, grace, power and vision” and a focus on Black individuals whose achievements shall be honored.

Data piece 1 – 00:00 – 00:07



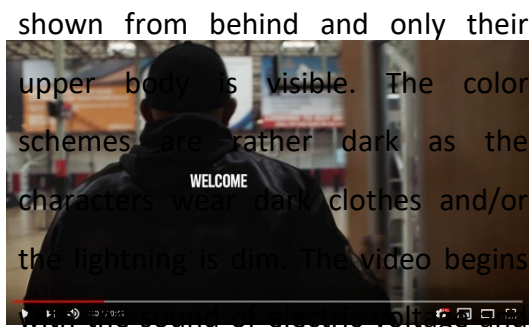
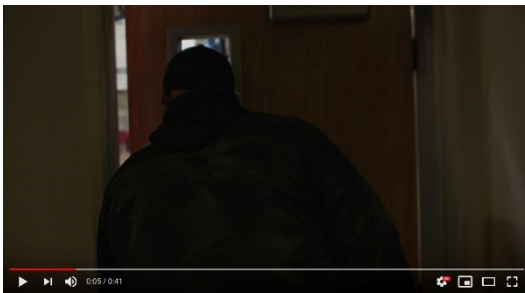
M.A.
Kevin



10th Semester Thesis
Student-Nr.: 20191994
Aalborg, May 2021

Description

The video starts with four of the five main characters being introduced as they enter or exit into spaces. Those spaces are a baseball practice facility, the streets, a school gym and another gym where basketball is being played. All characters are



shown from behind and only their upper body is visible. The color schemes are rather dark as the characters wear dark clothes and/or the lighting is dim. The video begins with the sound of electrical voltage and the steps of characters walking. After three seconds the beat that underlies the video until the end sets in. After two seconds the "honoring black excellence" logo appears for just under two seconds in white letters on a dark background.

1. Visuals/Images

The six images are centered around each individual in each image which puts all the attention on them because they are the only characters, and no other action can be observed. As we cannot see their faces yet, the characters are shown with their backs turned to the viewer, one immediately starts asking who those people might be and what they might be up to.

2. Sounds/Music

The noise that is heard for the first two seconds and sounds like electrical voltage underpins the charged atmosphere that we don't know what is happening, but only see that the characters are ready for action, even though we don't know them yet. Fitting to the environment, the electrical voltage could also come from a hall lighting or floodlighting system, as they are being used in sports facilities. After two seconds steps of different people can be noticed as they are heading

somewhere. After three seconds the beat sets in which is comprised of heavy drums interrupted by a sound that is similar to clapping which creates a dynamic rhythm that calls for action.

3. Colors

Dark colors dominate the first sequence as the characters seem to come out of the shadows or dark spaces, respectively. Primarily the color black in this case signifies anonymity as we do not know the characters yet, as well as mystery because we neither know what will happen (Fusco 2016). The light color schemes found in the street and the basketball gym give the impression that something positive can happen there.

4. Text

The textual element within this sequence is the display of the "honoring black excellence" logo for two seconds. The white font on a dark background makes the logo very visible and yet appeals through its simplicity.

The logo consists of a creative form representing the first letters of "Honoring Black Excellence" H, B and E. The logo is designed so that two rectangles on top of each other on the left side and two rectangles on the right side frame the curves of the B in the middle. The curves of the B look like two arrows pointing twice from one rectangle to the other. The curves of the B look like two arrows pointing from one rectangle to the other. The logo represents Adidas' self-imposed goal with the campaign "Building a bridge from the past to the future is the marker of Black excellence - here and now we champion Black resilience, grace, power, and vision for today and for tomorrow. Get inspired by Black community leaders forging a path for the next generation." The logo creatively represents the past, the present pointing to the future, and the future.

5. Action/Gesture

All characters are leaving the space they have been in or are entering another space. This action means that the characters set out to do something. We as viewers can only suspect that it will have something to do with their locations, so the street, the baseball facility or the gyms they are entering. All characters seem

determined, judging from their body language as they either look down in concentrated fashion or stand upright looking forward ready for action.

M.A. Culture, Communication and Globalization
Kevin Schürmann

10th Semester Thesis
Student-Nr.: 20191994
Aalborg, May 2021

Analysis

the first sequence is characterized by tension building and mystery. We learn that there are several characters who will play a role in the story, but we do not yet know exactly how. It becomes clear that the story takes place on two levels, so to speak, on the street and within the implied sports facilities. This is interesting because Adidas as a sportswear brand not only lives from what happens on sports fields, but also wants to be present on the streets through lifestyle.

Regarding the characters, it becomes clear that they are determined and look ahead to whatever they are about to do. Black identity in this first sequence is therefore becoming portrayed as being determined and ready for action in whatever “arena” whether it is the basketball court, the gym or the streets.

Data piece 2 – 00:08 – 00:09



Description

This sequence can be seen as the conclusive continuation of the first, as the last of the seven characters is being introduced. The character is only shown in back view at the beginning, like the characters in the first sequence but then the character turns around to look at the camera which creates the impression as the woman looks directly at the viewer. The female character is at the top of a staircase in an urban environment. the apartment buildings in the background give

the picture a dark impression, which is interrupted by the light gray sky in the background and the white clothes the woman is wearing. In the middle of the image the words "WELCOME TO THE KINGDOM" can be seen. The dynamic rhythm from the first sequence is continued in this sequence.

1. Visuals/Images

The focus in this sequence again lies on the individual as the woman is located in the middle of the picture being framed by the apartment blocks which become narrower and narrower towards the end. This creates the impression that her only destination and the way to it is dictated by her environment. However, the way to get there does not seem to be straight, which is suggested by the slanted perspective. There is a bright light at the end of the canyon, as if there is something promising waiting for her when she can leave it, which in turn creates the impression that her only chance to accomplish something positive is to escape this urban environment.

For the first time in the video, the focus also lies on the clothes she is wearing because Adidas' three stripes are clearly visible on the woman's jacket and hat. The outfit's colors of white and black form a contrast which draws attention to the women's clothing. You can't help but look at the apartment blocks on the left and right, which give a rather old and unclean impression, due to the gray and dark brown colors. The blocks are multi-story and make a run-down impression, which is why one immediately thinks of a rather run-down, neglected neighborhood.

2. Sounds/Music

As already pointed out the dynamic rhythm from the first sequence is continued in this sequence. However, there is a subliminal undefined rattling mixed in, which gives the impression of being in an urban environment which fits well with the environment shown in this sequence.

3. Colors

The gray and brown colors of the blocks give the impression that this is not a place you want to be in because the colors suggest a lack of coziness.

The black and white colors of the woman's outfit are a classic color combination. Although opposites in a visual sense, black and white do not compete, but the contrast creates a feeling of completion as "opposites attract." Furthermore, black and white are seen as extreme colors, which is why the outfit does not combine with the urban environment we see and stands on its own. The text "WELCOME TO THE KINGDOM" is also depicted in white lettering, which is why the character merges with the lettering in terms of meaning and forms a unity, stylizing the woman as part of the "kingdom" through her defensive body language and what appears to be an urban canyon even as its gatekeeper.

4. Text

The textual element in this sequence is the phrase "WELCOME TO THE KINGDOM" which at first glance does not provide a hundred percent clear meaning within what the viewer has seen so far of the video. The way in this textual modality appears however makes it clear that viewer is directly addressed and "welcomed", invited to discover whatever the "kingdom" is. This notion is supported by the woman turning around to look at the viewer's eyes.

The phrase appearing at this sequence suggests that the area with the apartment blocks is part of the "kingdom", which is striking because one would normally associate a kingdom with glamour and glory instead of brown and grey, old apartment blocks. By this, the neighborhood shown gets glorified in ironic fashion. The word kingdom seems as an exaggeration but works as part of a narrative that is being constructed through the textual modalities throughout the video by depicting the places in ironic fashion as overly nice places and then presenting them multimodally as actually better than expected. By this the places as well as the characters are being honored and stereotypes regarding both are being challenged.

5. Action/Gesture

After seeing her for a second from behind only, the woman turns around as if she just noticed that "we" as the viewers are following her. The woman has her hands in the bag of her jacket which suggests she is feeling comfortable in her surroundings.

Analysis

With the title “Honoring Black Excellence”, the description and stating goals of celebrating the Black Community i.a. Adidas sets the framework to look at the video in relation to black culture and therefore one unwillingly begins to associate the word kingdom with the black community in order to find out what it could mean in this context.

It seems likely that the producers of this video on behalf of Adidas when choosing the words that underlie this video, as with the choice of colors, were also inspired by historical symbolism, which leads the viewer onto an exciting path when deciphering the meaning behind “kingdom” in this context.

Adidas wants to honor “the regal past of Black kings and queens” and by the word “kingdom” one is animated to think about the “We Were Kings & Queens” narrative, which focuses on pre-colonial Black history, emphasizing that Black history did not begin with the slave trade. By doing this, a historical dimension is added to this commercial.

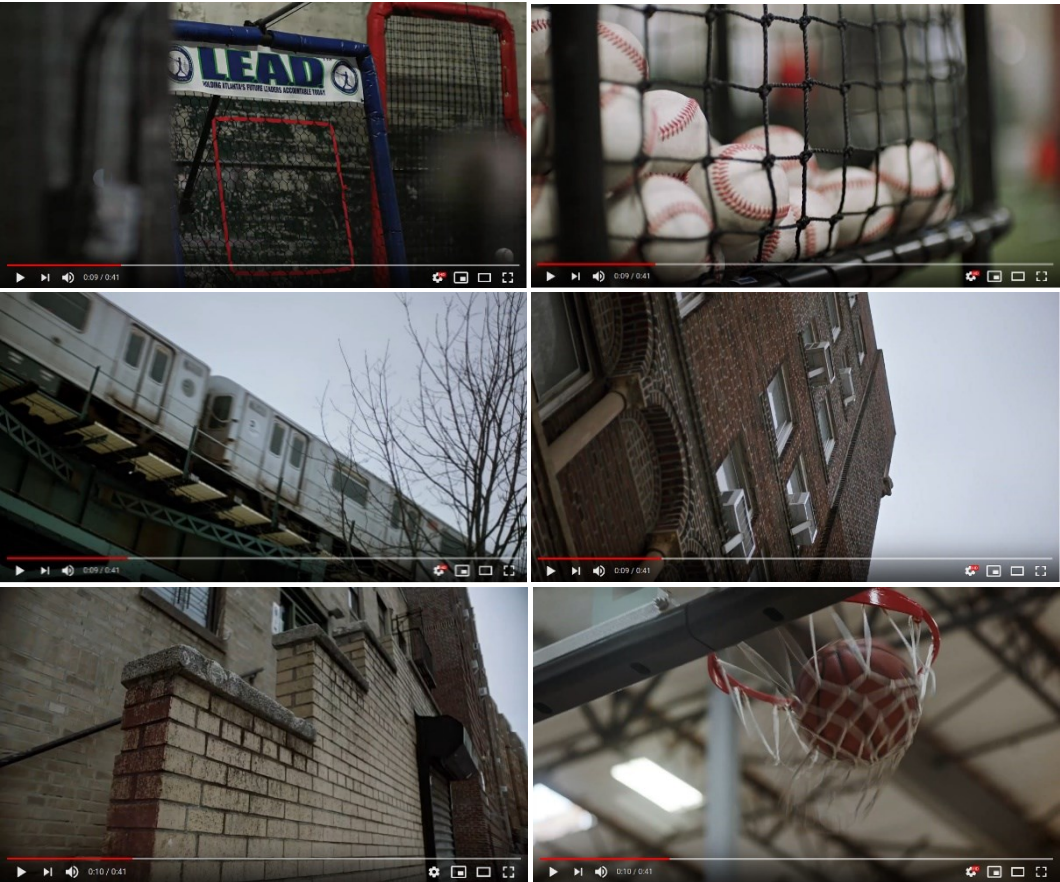
Another aspect of the “WELCOME TO THE KINGDOM” is that it is provocative. In the context of Black culture one might be tempted to ask which kingdom is being referred to.

Lexico, the Oxford dictionary’s first definition of “kingdom” states that a kingdom is a “country, state, or territory ruled by a king or queen” or alternatively “A realm associated with or regarded as being under the control of a particular person or thing” (Lexico.com). By this definition, African American characters are celebrated, and the “kingdom” is a territory which African American people shape. The notion of “kingdom” can be seen as a territory where Black actors influence the world with “everywhere” referring to literally the whole world or at least, as Adidas suggest in their video “from the cozy corners of the Bronx to the sunny courts of Los Angeles”, implicating the importance of the messages behind the video for the United States in particular.

In this data piece, the focus has been set multimodally on the urban environment in which the character apparently feels comfortable, as well as the phrase “WELCOME TO THE KINGDOM” which catches the viewers’ attention as it is up for negotiation what this phrase means when first seeing it. Black identity is being

portrayed in this sequence as something urban based on the environment, and as something modern and stylish based on the woman's streetwear, and as feeling comfortable in one's environment based on the woman's confident body language but as well as something provocative based on the phrase. The perspective and angles suggest that the way into the light, the escape from the dark canyon of negativity cannot happen in a straight line. The colors intensify the feeling of negativity in addition to the decay of the houses. In addition, the white of the textual modality, the white of the protagonist's clothing, and the light at the end of the canyon signal both innocence and hope and immaculateness. Since the protagonist wears both white and black, it is shown that she has both innocent sides that connect her to the positive future and black, dark sides that connect her to the negative surroundings.

Data piece 3 – 00:09 – 00:10



Description

This sequence only lasts approx. two seconds but consists of six images. The human characters cannot be seen in these frames. The music from the first sequences is interrupted by two clicking sounds between the first two images, the sound of a driving metro between the third and fourth image, and the sound of a basketball going through the net.

1. Visuals/Images

The first two images show details of a baseball practice facility. The first image shows two nets that are used in baseball practices to protect the ball from flying away too far. In the center of the image is a sign that is attached to the larger blue net that says "L.E.A.D. - Holding Atlanta's future leaders accountable today". The second image shows a closeup of baseballs in a net. Through both images the attention is being set on the sport of baseball as an area of activity, which aligns the video with the sport and more specifically directs the attention toward the L.E.A.D. program. However, because the image is only visible for a fraction of a second, the focus is placed on the word lead, the name of a non-profit organization that is composed of the initial letters of the words launching, exposing, advising, and directing (lead2legacy.org) that represent the vision of the organization. The viewer is forced to look at the word LEAD and one cannot help but associate the notion of leadership with sports, and black identity, which in turn becomes part of the message of the video.

The third, fourth and fifth image belong together based on the equal color of the sky and content wise coherence. The third picture shows a moving subway on elevated tracks above ground level. The railroad and the infrastructure no longer seem to be in the best condition. The tree in the right part of the picture is bare and has no leaves, suggesting that it is winter. The fourth picture shows a brown-red apartment block with air conditioners installed on some windows from the perspective looking obliquely upwards. The fifth picture shows a beige-gray wall of a staircase on the outside of an apartment block that is next to the red-brown block from the fourth picture. There are clear signs of weathering and deterioration. The three images combine to form an overall impression due to their proximity in terms of content as well as their rapid chronological succession.

The impression is that of an American urbanity (due to the elevated metro) that has seen much better times and whose deterioration is clearly noticeable. The sadness of the scene is completed by the traces of use, the dark colors of the buildings and the gray sky as well as the leaflessness of the tree.

In the sixth picture a basketball successfully landing in the net of a basket in a gym can be observed. As a viewer and sports fan, there's no getting around the fact that this moment is aesthetically pleasing and perceived as a success experience.

2. Sounds/Music

The first two images are accompanied by the repeating sound of a light system being switched on (which can also be perceived visually in the first two images in the video). This means that a certain action is about to begin. Immediately afterwards, the shrill of the metro on the tracks is heard, which unmistakably reflects the feeling of being in a big city. Again, immediately afterwards, the shrill is interrupted by the satisfying sound that every basketball fan when the ball sinks into the net. This serves to confirm what has been seen as well as to satisfy the viewer underlying the happy event of seeing and hearing a successful basket.

The rapid succession of the different sounds creates stress among the audience and accentuates the hectic pace of the alternating images. The resulting overall impression reflects the hectic and stress of a big city.

3. Colors

As already described, the dark, gray-brown and beige colors contribute to a sobering overall image of an urban environment. However, the switched on lighting in the baseball facility together with the white background on which L.E.A.D. is written as well as the white color of the baseballs as well as the lighting of the gym in which the basketball hoop falls provide bright positive accents that interrupt the dark color dreariness.

As no text and human interaction can be perceived during this sequence, those categories will be skipped in order to go to the analysis of this data set directly.

Analysis

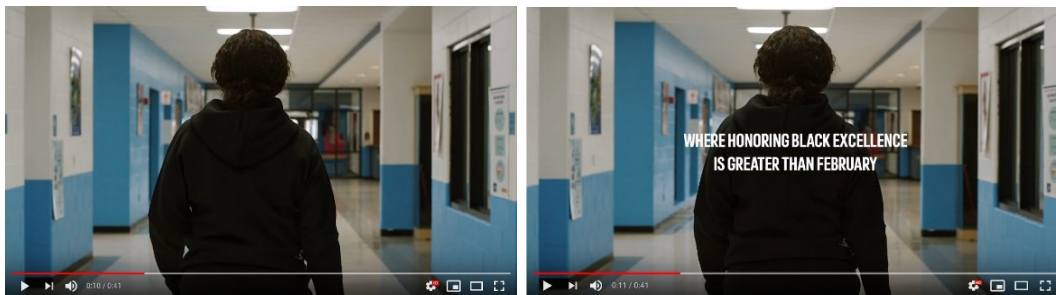
The first image introduces the Atlanta-based “501 (c)3 nonprofit organization” L.E.A.D. in a subtle but efficient way as the organization’s logo and slogan can only be seen for a fraction of a second. However it showcases a grassroots organization that aims at improving the lives of black youth in Atlanta and by that underlies the credibility of Adidas’ campaign promise to honor African American involvement in communities.

By putting the focus on the sport of baseball in the second image in an African-American context is special because “America's National Pastime” and African-Americans have a distinctive history with regard to Civil Rights, which shall be elucidated later within this analysis.

In this sequence we see how representations from sports facilities are interrupted by those of a dreary, gray, big city routine, symbolizing the interwovenness of sports and everyday life. Not only leadership is being emphasized, but also how sports can provide special moments in mundane urban environments.

Although black identity is not portrayed by human characters in this sequence, the environment in which many African Americans live is. In addition, the value of sports is emphasized in this sequence, which not only benefits urban African Americans, but also Adidas as a sportswear brand.

Data piece 4 – 00:10 – 00:11



Description

This sequence not only resumes the rhythm, but also follows on from the first two sequences in terms of design and content, as we see one of the main characters in a back view as she walks down a tidy and well-kept, brightly lit school corridor. In the center of the image, the text "WHERE HONORING BLACK EXCELLENCE IS GREATER THAN FEBRUARY" appears in white letters that stand out clearly against the background. The music still appears fast but now neutral.

1. Visuals/Images

In the two images, the focus is on the woman who in the first sequence was seen in the dark gymnasium of probably the same school. As she is now walking through the school corridor, a connection is made between sport and education. the corridor is brightly lit and looks very neat. The floor is shiny, and the walls are painted in an appealing white and blue. this gives the impression that it is a school that is of high quality. The floor is shiny, and the walls are painted in an appealing white and blue, which gives the impression that it is a quality school. This creates the impression that a good education, which is symbolized by the clean school

corridor, is given great value. Also the lighting of the school corridor are literally above the woman, which gives additional meaning to the role of education. The way the corridor gets narrower towards the end, and the way the lights illuminate the character's path can be seen as a parallelism to the sequence in which the character is led by the shabby, dark urban environment. However, there is a big contrast because looking at the school environment here, this parallelism serves as a metaphor that says the character is being led down the right (straight instead of crooked) path by education.

2. Sounds/Music

The music from the first two sequences is taken up again, but slightly changed and supplemented by a regular high tone, which still makes the beat seem fast, but also neutral and not only action-focused. The rhythm stimulates curiosity and directs the attention to the visual actions of the video. It becomes clear that the rhythm is being inspired by trap rhythm that will accompany the images throughout most of the video.

Trap music is a subgenre of hip-hop that developed mainly in the southern states of the USA and its origins are mainly associated with the urban area of Atlanta. Trap is all about the beat: a dragging bass in a gritty, aggressive atmosphere, stuttering hi-hats and rattling snare rolls (Patrick 2016). The name "trap" is a slang term. In the U.S. drug scene, it refers to the place where drug deals take place (Raymer 2012). With the trap rhythm, tribute is paid to African-American musical culture as well as to African-American urban culture.

3. Colors

As already mentioned, the bright colors of the walls make the school look high-class. The black color of the protagonist's sportswear stands out strongly against the bright colors of the corridor, which is why there is a focus on the woman.

4. Text

The textual element in this data piece reads "WHERE HONORING BLACK EXCELLENCE IS GREATER THAN FEBRUARY". Together with the previous text "WELCOME TO THE KINGDOM", the text alludes to the "HBE" campaign, which is designed to celebrate "Black Excellence" not only in the month of February, which

is regularly celebrated as Black History Month in the USA, but all year round, which i.A. enhances the perception of the value of the campaign. This is to take the motive of honoring "black excellence" beyond a mere celebration and to set the campaign apart from others. The text is also critical of other companies and organizations that use February to promote their own brand with the show of social responsibility in regard to Black identity issues. Through this textual element, Adidas claims to be part of this kingdom through its association with black characters, thus wanting the audience to perceive the brand in harmony with African-American people.

5. Action/Gesture

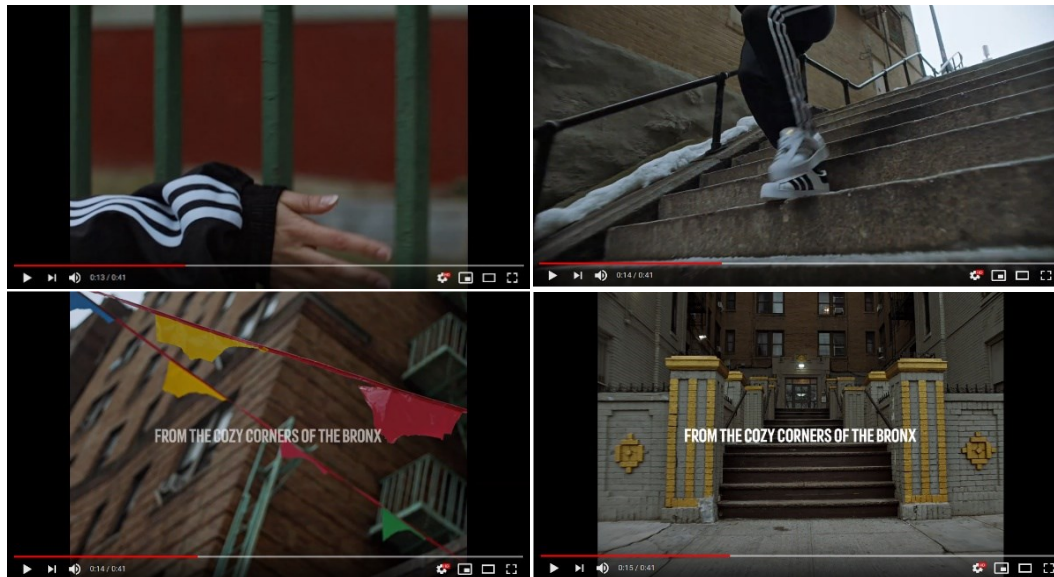
The female protagonist strides purposefully through the corridor, which, as in the first sequences, emphasizes the determination of the character. Since the woman also seems to know her way through the hallway, this suggests that the woman seems to be in the right place at the right time, which in turn emphasizes the role of education and the connection between sport and education as she was previously seen in the gym as well as the fact that she is wearing an athletic outfit.

Analysis

In this sequence, a clear connection is made between sport, education and black identity. For this reason, it can be assumed that the producers as well as adidas and the characters want to emphasize the importance of education. In this way, adidas as a sportswear brand goes beyond its sports and lifestyle/streetwear playground and tries to positively influence the audience with regard to their everyday life and especially education. This is remarkable considering the fact that there has been a debate in the USA for some time now in which experts have repeatedly emphasized the value of education in comparison to sports. The debate stems from the fact that in the United States, sports are becoming increasingly important at schools and universities, and that among others the African-American youth in the long term suffer from the fact that, unfortunately, education often gets neglected in the system that uprates sports performance over educational performance (Whitmire 2010). It is remarkable that Adidas establishes education as part of Black identity within this video. Furthermore this

connection between sports, education and African American identity is portrayed multimodally as the polished, valuable straight path to success in contrast to the crooked path that is guided by the shabby and dark urban environment shown in the sequence before.

Data piece 5 – 00:13 – 00:15



Description

Data piece 5 and 6 can be seen as a whole, but for the analysis I decided to separate them because in the first images the focus is on action and the urban environment, and in the second images the focus of attention is on the individual.

In the first part of the sequence, the woman in the black adidas jacket from the urban sequence from before is seen running her hands along dark green bars. Then you can see her taking the stairs she was standing at the top of with quick steps downwards. Especially her black adidas pants and her white adidas sneakers are in the foreground. In the second part you can see two more impressions of the big city life in which the character is situated. The white lettering "FROM THE COZY CORNERS OF THE BRONX" in the middle of the picture is striking, making it clear that this scene takes place in the Bronx, the famous district of New York. The music is the same as before with the addition of the footsteps of the woman running down the stairs.

1. Visuals/Images

The actions of the woman in the black tracksuit give the video the impression of activity in the city. The fact that the adidas brand is also at the center of this underscores adidas' ambition not only to produce sportswear for the sports sector, but as a sportswear brand also clothing for the urban leisure look. adidas presents the sports-inspired leisure look here. The black and white clothes and the new white shoes look special, stylish and eye-catching in the gray dominated tattered environment shown in these first two photos.

The two other images are similar to the previous urban renderings. The reddish brown apartment block and the gray staircase with gray walls and dark facade make the same impression as the images shown previously. However, the color accents in these images make a big difference. Working as deviations from the color scheme used in creating these urban impressions, those discordant colors are used to refocus the viewer attention (Risk 2020) on giving the impression that the area is not only grey and dark, but also bright elements, as those colorful accents bring elements of happiness to the dreary environment shown.

2. Sounds/Music

The fast rhythm complemented by the step sounds in combination with the fast sequence of images make this sequence seem very dynamic and action-packed. This underscores both the hectic activity of the actor and as well as the hectic life in the big city.

3. Colors

The green color of the bars the woman touches represent hope, the hope of change, the hope of breaking the bars of the past in regard to racial equality. Green is also the color you see the most in the natural environment (van Braam 2020) which means that the woman is in her natural surroundings where she feels home and comfortable. When the woman runs down the stairs the black and white colors of her shoes and clothes both seem to stand out in the gray surroundings, however the color schemes of black, white and grey also fit nicely together in this image because grey is an intermediate color between black and white.

The broken colorful flags, which have already experienced better times, symbolize the rough environment which has apparently also experienced better times.

Nevertheless, those colorful flags give the image something pleasing through their color variety and since one associates such flags with a joyful event, perhaps a block party in this context. A little color does the gray and brown environment good. The same goes for the yellow accents in the last image which stand out clearly against the predominant gray.

4. Text

The textual element in this sequence reads "FROM THE COZY CORNERS OF THE BRONX" which is an ironic wordplay which goes in hand with the images displayed in this sequence.

It is ironic because to the public the Bronx is generally not being associated with "cozy corners" but with rather the opposite. Starting in the 1970s the Bronx underwent a continuous process of degradation and decline that - helped by the cinema and television - ended up giving it the fearsome image and the bad reputation symbolizing violence, decay, and urban ruin that is still in the minds of people when they think about the borough today. For decades, the multi-ethnic, poor and overpopulated neighborhood was a victim of racial segregation and injustice, and was the most bitter expression of poverty, marginalization and social inequality and labelled as New York's ghetto. Until recently crime, fear and insecurity were the face of everyday life in the Bronx (Isusi 2020) and the public still has this image of the Bronx in mind. Although the Bronx is still not just the poorest borough in the city of New York but the 15th District, or NY-15, its chief congressional district, is the poorest in the nation (Morgan 2020). However, in present times the district is trying to return to normalcy through reconstruction, re-housing and other development projects in order to recover and lift its head (Isusi 2020). The Bronx and its many problems have been linked to its African-American population, as Black people for decades represented the largest population group and the media contributed to that. In 2021 over 43% of the around 1.5 million people living in the Bronx are African American (worldpopulationreview.com), which makes the area one of the centers of Black culture in the United States. Looking at the described history of the Bronx and its African-American population it is admirable that Adidas wants to be associated

with this area and with this video is taking the side of the residents of the Bronx, which is not only shaped by African-Americans, but is extremely multicultural.

M.A. Culture, Communication and Globalization
Kevin Schnitzler

10th Semester Thesis
Film Studies 2019/2021
Aalborg, May 2021

The text "FROM THE COZY CORNERS OF THE BRONX" goes in hand with the images which have shown us a predominantly gray-brown, roughened environment which one would never describe as cozy; thus the irony is fitting and therefore can capture the viewers' attention efficiently and make the audience reflect about the text in regard to what is being shown visually.

5. Action/Gesture

On the first picture you can see the protagonist rattling along bars. The three stripes on the adidas jacket are clearly visible here. The bars stand for the urban environment, but mean more than that, because the action seems as if the protagonist, supported by adidas, wants to shake or play with the boundaries represented by the bars. In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and racial emancipation ostensibly the boundaries that still exist in American society with regard to race.

Analysis

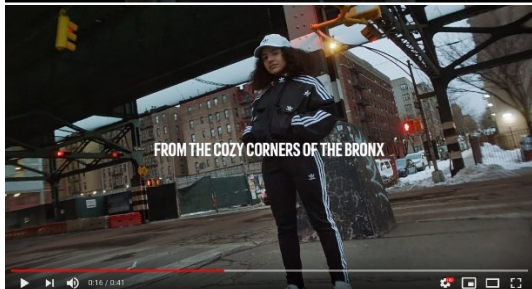
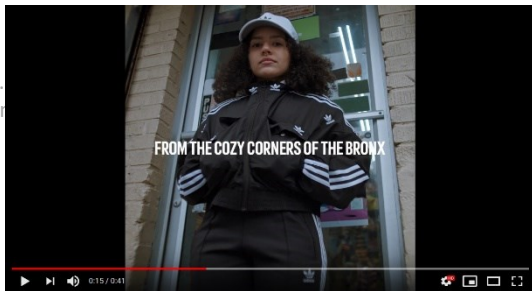
In this sequence, the focus is again on the presentation of the urban environment. The activities of the woman and the fast rhythm in the background create a hectic atmosphere. The woman, who seems to be at home in the urban environment of the Bronx, signals to the viewer through her body language and her actions (brushing against the bars) that she feels comfortable in the environment shown. The character, the music and the color details show that the environment is not only gray and dark, but that it also has colorful elements and action to offer.

At the forefront of this sequence, however, is the textual element "FROM THE COZY CORNERS OF THE BRONX" which clearly sets the focus on the geographical and cultural region of the Bronx. This ironic statement brings various implications in relation to meaning making. On the one hand, Adidas shows that as a brand stands behind the Bronx and its inhabitants and wants to be associated with everything the Bronx is associated with. On the other hand, the brand emphasizes through the supposedly ironic element "cozy corners" that the Bronx is not the horrible place it seems to be (and as suggested by the brand itself in various

images), but that it offers cozy sides where people feel at home (like the woman at the center of attention). Thus, part of this sequence is to multimodally express that people in neighborhoods like the Bronx are valued and judged not because of the unattractiveness of their district, but because of their actions. In addition, Adidas is trying to contribute to the improvement of the district's image through its statement. After all, the global brand is taking its place on the side of one of the poorest districts in the United States, and also a district that is known for its African-American culture, its people and history.

Data piece 6 – 00:15 -00:16

M.A.
Kevin



Description

As outlined, this sequence follows on from the content of the previous one as the character is the same as previously as well as the urban environment of the Bronx. Those three images conclude this sequence powerfully content wise. The focus is clearly on the female individual, as she can be seen in various poses in the center of the images. In terms of color, this sequence seems more interesting than the previous ones, as the colors are more multi-faceted and saturated, making the scene appear livelier and more vibrant. The same intense fast rhythm as before can be noticed with the addition of car horns. The textual element "FROM THE COZY CORNERS OF THE BRONX" is still in the spotlight next to or under the female character, respectively.

1. Visuals/Images

The focus is on the individual which signals that with this sequence adidas shows that the brand does not care where you come from or where you live, but wants to be worn by you with pride, no matter where you come from.

The first image shows the female lead in portrait mode. so it looks like the video/photo is taken with the smartphone, which gives the image street credibility as it resembles the culture of the young generation of consumers for which the smartphone is an essential tool to post content on social media e.g.

The female protagonist at the center of this sequence is called Nathaly Delacruz.

This information is provided on the HBE website on adidas.com. Furthermore the

following information is presented about her:

M.A. Culture, Communication and Globalization
Kevin Schmiedecke

10th Semester Thesis
Student-Nr.: 20191994

Figure 6 - retrieved from
<https://news.adidas.com/creating-lasting-change-now/honoring-black-excellence/s/75c5e3d7-ba3f-4e98-88ab-02f37cbaa37d>

NATHALY DELACRUZ

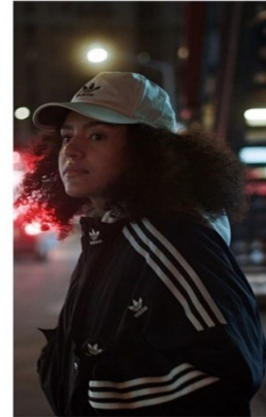
BRONX NATIVE AND ORIGINALS

ASSISTANT DESIGNER NATHALY

DELACRUZ IS USING HER PLATFORM TO

CELEBRATE WHAT BLACK EXCELLENCE

MEANS IN HER BOROUGH.



Since the information about Nathaly and the other characters is conveyed honestly and transparently, for example via the HBE website or Instagram, and not artificially or exaggeratedly placed in the focus of attention, lends the campaign credibility.

In this sequence, like in previous and following ones, it becomes apparent that Adidas intends to tell a positive narrative that is aimed at changing existing stereotypes in regard to Black identity because the presentation of the urban environment, more precisely the Bronx and its inhabitants represented by Nathaly, is designed to multimodally tell a narrative in which the stereotypes in the audience's minds about the neighborhood and its inhabitants are overcome or at least challenged. Nathaly serves as an example of authentic storytelling to come back to the concept of storytelling, as she evidently works for Adidas, which puts the brand in a positive light, because not only is the brand in the spotlight, but an employee is offered a stage for a social cause. It is vital that nothing is glossed over but comes across as authentic.

2. Sounds/Music

The subtle addition of car horn sounds emphasizes the urban environment of the Bronx. Together with the bustling rhythm, a feeling of action and hustle and bustle is being suggested, which makes the presentation seem more authentic.

3. Colors

The colors in the picture authentically reflect the image of the streets in the Bronx. Since there is snow, it is probably winter, so it is no surprise the different shades of grey of the sky, the housing blocks and the streets dominate the picture. Through the different light accents of the street lighting, the house lighting or the red traffic lights however, the image becomes alive.

4. Text

The textual modality was already addressed in the previous sequence and further implications are explained in the analysis.

5. Action/Gesture

In the first picture a low angle shot frames Nathaly from below her eyeline. According to Lammon (2020) these camera shots most often emphasize power dynamics between characters. In this image the emotions or feelings about the subject in the frame are conveyed, as the low-angle shot makes her look strong and powerful (Hellerman 2019). Her confident posture with her hands in her jacket and the fact that she is actually looking down in the camera (or put differently looks down on the viewer) enhance the impression of superiority and her position of power. The same applies to the other two images where Nathaly is being shown in the same confident posture but her whole body and her wide stance is shown, which equally demonstrates her confidence. By showing her whole body in the low-angle shot as well as the streets of the Bronx, the character merges with her surroundings, which symbolizes how confident she is feeling in her neighborhood.

This is a crucial contrast to the sequence where Nathaly seems to be sent on a crooked path by her urban, dark and brown environment which signals the negative impact of her environment on her. Here it works as the opposite as the environment she is being in seems to make her powerful and strong. Also the placement of her hands in her pockets, which in the first sequence appeared to be defensive and dismissive can be interpreted as self-confident and powerful. By this the stereotype of the bad influence of the poor, urban environment on individuals is being turned around. The last two images are taken from the so called "Dutch Angle", which means that the shot is composed with vertical lines at an angle to the side of the frame, or so that the horizon line of the shot is not parallel with the

bottom of the camera frame (hollywoodlexicon.com). Directors have used the Dutch angle to create a feeling, and to give the viewer a sense that the world is figuratively warped (Lennon 2020) or to make viewers feel uneasy, signaling that something is wrong, unsettled, or disorientating (Nashville Film Institute). In this sequence it animates the viewer to reflect about how he/she sees the character and what her position of power communicates. In the outlined context it reflects black excellence in the form of her being confident, expressive and stylish in an environment which many do not associate with those values.

Analysis

This sequence is as important regarding the messages regarding Black identity as it is for marketing reasons because the sequences featuring Nathaly Delacruz are the major parts of the video where clothes of Adidas' subdivision "Adidas Originals" are being put into the spotlight. Adidas Originals is the brand's division known for its classic Trefoil logo was launched in 2001 and focuses on lifestyle and heritage products (highsnobity.com). One of the reasons Adidas puts an emphasis on its connections with the Bronx despite of showing support for its inhabitants and the area in this sequence, is its self-presentation not only as a sportswear brand that is connected with sports, but as a streetwear brand that is connected to fashion and street culture. You can see that Nathaly is wearing the same Adidas Originals streetwear outfit throughout the video. This is interesting to consider at this point because it can contribute to Black identity construction in a way that is formed from the appeal of the brand's, music and fashion history which have merged.

The place at the heart of this sequence is the Bronx, where in the 1970s hip-hop was born as a reaction to disco culture as Caribbean immigrants and African-American youth in disenfranchised neighborhoods began coming together for impromptu block parties (DeLeon 2019). With the years hip-hop became a music and cultural movement (Britannica.com), influenced also by one of the most famous hip hop acts of the 1980s, Run-DMC from New York City, who are regarded as one of the most influential acts in the history of hip hop culture. This is relevant because the union between adidas and Run-DMC established a milestone in

history, becoming the first sponsorship of a musical group from a sports brand (footdistrict.com 2020). As adidas itself claims on its webpage

M.A. In the early 1980s RUN DMC burst onto the scene and revolutionised the way we all
Kevir view fashion, wearing thick gold chains, adidas tracksuits, and unlaced Superstars with the tongue popping out. Declaring their allegiance to the brand, RUN DMC's 1986 instant classic "My adidas" solidified the legend of the Superstar shoe in hip-hop lore forever. Beyond style, it's no exaggeration to say that from the beginning, RUN DMC has always stood for breaking through the glass ceiling. The group's success has undoubtedly shone bright in modern history as a beacon for creative expression throughout the world. Today, adidas Originals honors the group's undeniable impact on pop-culture with a collaborative apparel and footwear collection.

Figure 7 - retrieved from <https://news.adidas.com/originals/paying-homage-to-hip-hop-history-with-our-run-dmc-collaboration/s/4c19cd34-0304-4f2f-a5fe-eb162eb728dd>

Through Adidas' collaboration with Run-DMC the brand secured and shaped its influential position in the streetwear market which continues until today through collaborations with rappers like Pusha-T, Kanye West or Pharrell Williams. The display of African-American confidence through Nathaly Delacruz in Adidas Originals streetwear at the founding place of hip-hop underlines the brands longstanding commitment to African-American hip-hop artists as well as African-American artistic expression and those connections become visible within this sequence.

Data piece 7 – 00:17 -00:19

M.A.
Kevin



Description

For the first time in the HBE video the scenery appears cheerful and sunny because bright and vivid colors dominate the picture. The fast rhythm is still the same as in the previous sequences. The sequence consists of four images showing the protagonist from different perspectives and in varying poses. The protagonist is Etop Udo-Ema, about whom the HBE campaign website provides the following information:



Figure 8 - retrieved from <https://news.adidas.com/creating-lasting-change-now/honoring-black-excellence/s/75c5e3d7-ba3f-4e98-88ab-02f37cbaa37d>

The textual modality reads “TO THE SUNNY COURTS OF LOS ANGELES” and is part of the larger text that is underlying this video. This and the pictures show the link to the sport of basketball as already seen in a previous sequence.

1. Visuals/Images

It is noticeable that the camera work and the resulting angles from which the images in this sequence were shot are reminiscent of a video that, for example, your buddy takes of you while playing, because the cuts and perspectives are not

straight, and the proportions are not professionally managed which underlines the casualness and relaxedness that the sequence evokes.

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The first picture shows the character holding the ball in his hands. His stare is directed downwards at the ball which underpins his determination to basketball. The perspective, as in the other photos of the sequence, is that of the close up shot which gives the viewer a detailed and intimate impression of the character and his actions.

The second image is a close-up of the character with the focus on the character's face and upper body. This allows us to see the neutral but determined facial expression of the character. Through the close up we get to know the character more closely, which is why a certain intimacy is created. Because the character is also looking directly into the camera, the viewer gets the impression that the character is in direct eye contact with him/her, which has the effect that the viewer builds up an emotional connection to the character within a very short time. Also clearly visible are the black bars on the right and left, the so-called letterboxing, i.e. the process of adding black bars to make videos in old formats such as 4:3 suitable for modern widescreens. In this case, it creates a nostalgia factor that puts the actor in a positive light.

In addition, the text "TO THE SUNNY COURTS OF LOS ANGELES" is displayed.

The third image is similar to the first in its design. However, the character throws the ball up with one hand and his gaze is directed downwards. This gives the impression that the man seems to have everything under control, symbolized by the ball controlled with one hand, as well as a certain nonchalance and coolness, because the man does not need eye contact to control the ball.

In the fourth and last image, the man is posing in the center of the image and in the central position of the basketball court at the free-throw line. The character's confident posture is evident, as is his connection to basketball, his environment (because for the first time we get a closer look at the environment outside the court), and the textual modality that remains in the center position.

2. Sounds/Music

The music in this sequence does not contribute individually to the meaning making, as it is the same as in the previously presented sequences. It is worth mentioning that the rhythm in this scene also arouses curiosity about what is being seen and the different depictions of diverse individuals.

3. Colors

The colorful, bright and friendly colors are clearly different from the gray, brown and dark colors from previous sequences. The dominant color in all the images is sky blue, as it can be found both in the sky and in the protagonist's clothes. In addition to the positive feelings the color evokes through the bright blue sky, the light blue conveys, among other things, a sense of trust, loyalty, cleanliness, and understanding (Morton 2021), which are attributes that shall be assigned to and represented through the character, not only through the choice of color but also through the portrayal of the surroundings, the protagonist's clothing and his facial expressions. The white-beige color of the sweater the man is wearing, with its innocent, easily stainable brightness, helps to create the impression that this color would not be worn, for example, in the gray-dark urban environment of the previous sequences, but only in this friendly, bright and tidy surroundings. Thus a contrast is being created not only to previous sequences, but also to the dirty and "ghetto" depictions of urban African-American streetball culture in movies e.g. The bright rich colors (including the green color of the lush nature in the background convey the feeling of completeness and prosperity.

4. Text

The textual modality in this sequence "TO THE SUNNY COURTS OF LOS ANGELES" stands in contrast to the text from the previous sequence "FROM THE COZY CORNERS OF THE BRONX" because the text is not meant ironically but rather literally. Both texts however, through the attributes sunny and cozy, present the geographical areas in a positive light. In the African-American cultural context, it is important to note that Los Angeles, with a black population of 9% (census.gov 2019), does not have an overly large black population, but the Compton neighborhood (where Etop does its community work) has become world famous for its African-American identity and culture through popular media such as hip-

hop music and film. This sequence, however, stands in stark contrast to Compton's image of gang violence and crime. The mentioning of the "courts" puts street basketball in the limelight and through the combination of text and images one thinks of Los Angeles basketball courts being as "nice" as the one this sequence was being filmed and not of the many courts in urban problem areas like Compton where Etop is doing his work.

5. Action/Gesture

With regard to basketball, the character draws attention to himself through focused posture and mimic, which shows his determination in regard to the sport. This can be seen in the first and third images. The last image is the most expressive in terms of body language, as it shows Etop in a confident (wide stance, feet pointing outward, also looking ahead), but also relaxed (one hand in his pocket, the other holding the basketball casually against his body) posture. His gaze is clear and direct in a challenging manner towards the camera, as if he is challenging the viewer with his confident gaze. His facial expression is neutral, as if he wants to challenge the viewer with his presence.

Analysis

Even without knowing the character and his work the viewer can clearly see the created link between African-American identity and the sport of basketball within this sequence. Thus this connection and why it is touched upon within this video is being explained in further detail.

Basketball and African Americans share a rich history as the sport became popular in African American communities in the early 1900s. Basically since its invention Black Americans enjoyed the sport no matter their origin, class or geographical area and have always had great players. Since black players were allowed into white colleges and the NBA in the 1950s and 1960s., black athletes have dominated the sport and many players who are regarded as the best of all time have been black (Roe 2009). Because of this and the fact that in 2007, despite comprising only 12 percent of the overall United States' population, African American athletes represented 75 percent of the roster spots in National Basketball Association (NBA) have led to the public perception that professional

basketball is being associated with African American athletes (McSweeney 2008: 5).

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But basketball has not only been associated with African Americans through e.g. the legendary Black players, but in the 1990s the contemporary manifestation of playground basketball became known as “street” or “blacktop” basketball became popular through media and advertising. Several companies even produced commercials advertising athletic shoes and other products using the jargon and sights and sounds of urban, black America (Roe 2009). Equally important has been the depiction of African-Americans in movies related to basketball. Various movies, such as Hoop Dreams, He Got Game, Sunset Park, Above the Rim, and Heaven is a Playground, portray black characters as impoverished and subjugated by society, which has spread the belief that African Americans must either excel athletically or sell drugs in order to escape poverty.

Also other types of popular culture most notably hip-hop music have reinforced this belief in regard to athletics so that both Caucasians and African Americans appear to have accepted this myth as an irrefutable truth. For example, rapper Notorious B.I.G. states on his 1994 debut album Ready to Die that “because the streets is a short stop/ either you’re slingin crack rock or you got a wicked jumpshot/ s–t, it’s hard being young from the slums.”² Because the Notorious B.I.G. is often viewed as a reliable social critic, this statement evokes a sense of desperation in “the slums” that listeners assume is applicable to the African American community as a whole. Even comedian Bill Cosby has bought into this myth, as is evident in his now infamous statement that black parents believe basketball shoes are a better investment for their children than is education (McSweeney 2008: 5/6).

Furthermore scholars and social critics argue that the African American dominance of athletics is caused by the community’s reliance on the profession as an avenue out of poverty. The outcome of this dependence, many believe, is that black youths collectively focus too little on developing important educational skills. Presumably, when their potential career in sports inevitably ends before the professional level, these youths are ill-equipped to succeed in the workforce (McSweeney 2008: 5). This notion has already been touched upon when analyzing a previous sequence with regard to education.

This sequence symbolizes the culture of street basketball, among other things, simply because it takes place on one of the many courts located throughout the USA. African-American culture and the before-mentioned depiction of urban street basketball culture in popular culture through movies, hip-hop and advertising who portray African-American basketball players and other actors related as impoverished, subjugated and “ghetto” cannot be found in this video. For in the course of HBE, such stereotypes are to be broken meaningfully through storytelling and the presentation of influential black actors. This is created through several stylistic means.

Through the color combinations that radiate prosperity, brightness and happiness, the image of basketball played in the run-down, poor, urban and gray-dominated environment is overturned. Here the beauty of the environment is in the foreground, signaling that basketball is not only played by African-Americans in the "ghetto", but everywhere.

The appearance of the character Etop, who is anything but the black, impoverished and subjugated character, contributes to the removal of the aforementioned stereotypes. His clothing individually signals the opposite: his athletic appearance with the base cap and sneakers that are common for coaches makes his connection to sport clear. In the first image, his silver wristwatch is shown as he holds the ball with this hand, which reveals something about the character, since in the age of the smartphone, the watch itself is charged with meaning (Wiseman 2020):

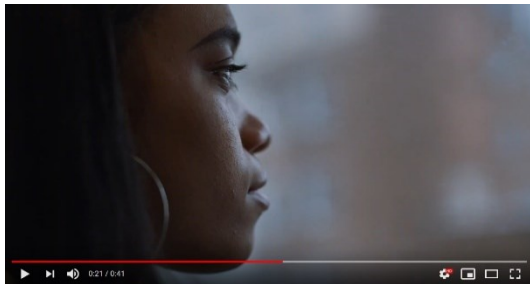
on one hand it symbolizes prosperity and achievement as a material symbol, on the other hand it suggests that its wearer has the overview and is in control of his life. The aspect of wealth and achievement is confirmed by the fact that Etop wears a sweater over his shirt, which looks sporty as well as serious, elegant and down-to-earth. One gets the impression that Etop has achieved something within his community. The fact that both the sweater and his basecap bear the adidas logo signals that Adidas not only makes clothes for young people, but also equips older generations.

The basketball court is one of the many courts found in almost every american community, reflecting the value of the community, which is symbolically charged

by the positive depiction. Together with the textual modality and the allusion "SUNNY COURTS OF LOS ANGELES" it is suggested that life in Afro American communities like Compton also have sunny sides and that sports can contribute to this side. It is also striking that the urban basketball is being represented by a coach not players, so the focus is being put on coaching and educating and the person who do that.

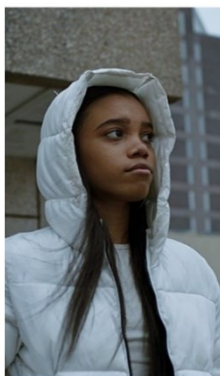
Data piece 8 – 00:20 – 00:21





Description

This sequence is again set in an urban environment, which can be seen from the gray apartment block with elevator in the background in the first image and the gray concrete. The predominantly gray color, the puddles of water and the thoughtful facial expressions of the character create a dreary atmosphere. The character is Alexis Douglas, another Adidas employee, through which the brand showcases its ambitions to stand up for African American equality.



ALEXIS DOUGLAS

ADIDAS PRODUCT MANAGER AND NORTH CAROLINA NATIVE ALEXIS DOUGLAS HAS BROUGHT THE DREAM FOR AN INCLUSIVE WINSTON-SALEM ECONOMY TO OUR FOREFRONT, HER VISION OF BLACK EXCELLENCE IN ACTION.

Figure 9 - retrieved from
<https://news.adidas.com/creating-lasting-change-now/honoring-black-excellence/s/75c5e3d7-ba3f-4e98-88ab-02f37cbaa37d>

1. Visuals/Images

In the first image, you can see Alexis in close-up from the upper part of her body upwards. She seems to be coming out of the elevator behind her, which is apparently part of an urban apartment complex. It seems to be cold and rainy, as she has the hood of her winter jacket on. In the second picture you can see only a part of Alexis pants and her shoes as she walks through a puddle on gray concrete. The baggy pants and the timeless Adidas Superstar sneakers symbolize modern streetwear fashion. In the third image, you can see a close-up of her face from a side perspective as she looks out the window, with only her face in focus and the apartment block blurred, drawing attention to her facial expression.

2. Sounds/Music

The music is still the same as before, which has no extra meaning on this sequence in detail.

3. Colors

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The predominant gray of the apartment block in the first image, the gray of the pure concrete in the second and the gray-brown of the blurred apartment block in the background of the third image create a dreary overall impression. In the first image, the white of Alexis' jacket stands out against the gray background. According to Fusco (2016), white stands for purity, cleanliness and innocence, among other things, which are values that are transferred to the character, since Alexis is enveloped by these values (symbolized by the white jacket). Against the gray background, it seems as if she is wrapped in a cloak of innocence in the difficult gray urbanity.

In the second image, her white sneakers rather represent cleanliness, which is preserved despite the wet and gray environment.

In the third image, Alexis' dark skin color stands out against the light gray background, emphasizing the beauty of her facial features and skin color.

5. Action/Gesture

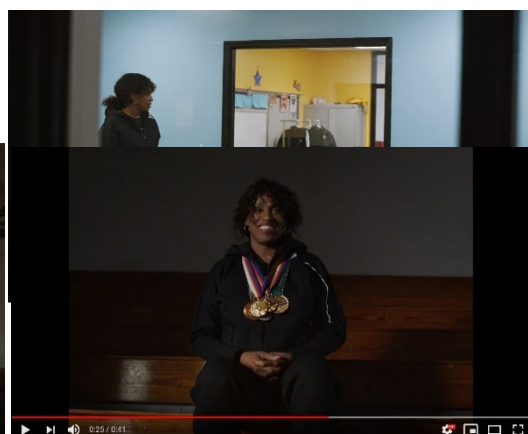
In the first image, Alexis' upright walk and raised head are noticeable, which give a self-confident impression of her. Her straightforward gaze shows that she has a specific goal. This goes along with the character traits of determination and self-confidence, which are also noticeable in the other characters of the video. Her walking through the puddle supports the notion of determination as Alexis is undisturbed by obstacles. In addition, her walk is a dynamic action that is supposed to lead her to her goal. In the last image, she seems thoughtful, as if reflecting on what is happening in the world outside the window. An allusion to the Black Lives Matter context and the terrible things that happen because of racial violence. Her neutral facial expression in the sequence invites the viewer to make up their own mind about her.

Analysis

The close up shot of her face in the third frame gives the audience a very personal impression of Alexis. In the sequence she is portrayed as self-confident and

determined through her posture and actions on the one hand, on the other hand the close up shot shows her very personal side, in which her natural beauty (through the perspective and the color juxtaposition in picture 3) but also her vulnerability and innocence (through the close ups and the white color of her jacket) are emphasized. The brand is presented only through her shoes, otherwise Alexis as an African-American woman in an urban environment with her strengths and weaknesses stands clearly in the center of attention.

Data piece 9 – 00:22 – 00:26





Description



JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE

TRACK AND FIELD TRAILBLAZER JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE RAISES RESOURCES FOR HER HUMBLE COMMUNITY OF EAST ST LOUIS, IL. THE JJK FOUNDATION IS ALL ABOUT CREATING OPPORTUNITIES – A PRIORITY FOR SPORT'S ILLUSTRATED "GREATEST FEMALE ATHLETE OF THE 20TH CENTURY."

In this sequence this character makes her second respectively third appearance after the short appearance at the beginning and the sequence where she walks down the school corridor. In this sequence she seems to be still at school. In the first image she looks out of the

window, in the second image she enters a computer room, in the third image you see her numerous medals hanging around her neck, in the fourth image you see her posing in the stands of a school gym with her medals around her neck and in the fifth image you see her from the front as she stands in the gym. The coloring is similar in the first two images and the last three. The previous rhythm is again clearly accelerated at the beginning of the sequence by fast drumming, which gives the video at this point an even faster, almost hectic dynamic. The character is Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

1. Visuals/Images

In the first image, Jackie looks out of the shadows from the window from which

Figure 10 - retrieved from <https://news.adidas.com/creating-lasting-change-now/honoring-black-excellence/s/75c5e3d7-ba3f-4e98-88ab-02f37cbaa37d>

bright light falls into the room and partially on her. The

composition is reminiscent of Alexis' window scene. Since the light here is rather bright and sunny, instead of gray, one gets the impression that Jackie is looking out into a positive future. The fact that she is standing in the shadow is symbolic of the dark sides that still exist in the USA with regard to being African American.

In the second image, Jackie is seen entering a computer room at a school, which is meant to symbolize the high value of education, because computers stand for the possibility of acquiring unlimited knowledge.

The fact that she is looking at the computers at the same time further emphasizes this aspect. In the third image, her numerous medals on the black background of her jacket in a close-up puts them into focus, which impressively shows off her athletic success. A connection between education and sporting success is thus established in relation to the previous image. The fourth image shows Jackie proudly looking into the camera with her medals. The close-up makes the shot very personal, and as a viewer, you share her joy over her success. The fact that she is sitting on the wooden benches of the gym emphasizes her modesty and is also an allusion to the role of education, as it reminds one of sitting on the wooden benches in the classroom, since she is in the school gym, which also emphasizes her humility, since she is returning to the school gym. In the fifth image, Jackie is shown from a low-angle shot, reminiscent of Nathaly previously, standing in the school gym, which makes her look impressive and powerful. The fact that the shot is from the school gym symbolizes the connection of education, sport and power clearly visible for all viewers.

2. Sounds/Music

The aforementioned addition of the fast drumbeats increases the tempo halfway through the video, which intensifies the drama and the perceived hectic. The third and fourth images of Jackie posing with her medals are accompanied by two clicks of a camera, as if this moment is being captured. This gives the impression that her achievements are to be emphasized once again. On the other hand, the display of her successes only appears as a snapshot, because before and after, Jackie is seen in the computer room and afterwards in the gym, which signals that Jackie has other tasks and that she is determined to continue her mission in the school.

3. Colors

Through the similarity in color, light blue by the way as in Etop's sequence or for example the light blue of the corridor from Jackie's first appearance, on the one hand hope and happiness are signaled through the color, on the other hand a

connection is drawn between the first image (the hope for bright times) and the second images' computer room (the path to success through education). The dark colors (Jackie in the shadows or in the dark gym) suggest that she does most of her work in the dark, unseen, which is a tribute to the many helpers in education or sports who do their work unnoticed by the public without being honored for it, for example, with medals.

4. Action/Gesture

By looking doubtfully through the window in the first frame, she also seems to be reflecting (as Alexis did in the sequence before) on what is going on in the world outside the window. In terms of her body language, the last image is particularly interesting because through her body language and direct eye contact with the viewer, she seems to be confidently challenging the audience about what she has seen and the connections of her personality, sports, the special role of education and African American equality.

Analysis

In this sequence, as in Jackie's first appearance, the importance of education is clearly emphasized. This time in connection with sports through the arranged sequence of images. A brighter future (image 1) is made possible by knowledge and education (image 2), which leads to success (symbolized by the medals in image 3), while modesty and self-confidence (images 4 and 5) are of great importance. Jackie as an African-American individual is being presented through the medals as athletically highly succesful (through her medals), but at the same time as humble (the showing of her success only lasts for a short moment) and determined (as she continues her work in the school). She is also looking for a brighter future and despite her successes, seems determined to go on working in a confident way. The choice of colors helps to emphasize the importance of education in addition to the images and on the other hand to create meaning itself to honor the helpers wo do their work unrecognized by society.

Data piece 10 – 00:27 - 00:27



Description

This sequence is about the portrayal of the characters CJ and Kelli Stewart. What is striking is the depiction of their physical and emotional bond as well as the effect of the color-intensive red and blue Adidas sportswear, which stands out clearly against the gray-brown backgrounds. The accelerated drumbeats accompany this sequence, and when the individual shots are shown, the flashing of a photo camera can again be perceived.

M.A.
Kevir

CJ AND KELLI STEWART

ATLANTA BORN AND RAISED; CJ AND KELLI STEWART HELP THEIR COMMUNITY'S AT-RISK GENERATION GROW INTO LEADERS. PAYING THEIR BLESSINGS FORWARD, THEY'VE BUILT A CREATIVE NON-PROFIT CALLED L.E.A.D., WHICH EMPOWERS ATLANTA'S YOUTH TO STEWARD THEIR VISION FOR THE FUTURE.

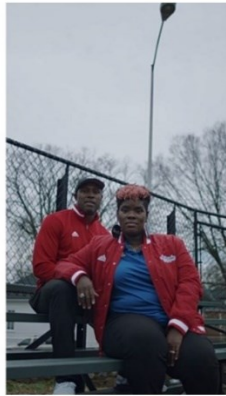


Figure 11 - retrieved from <https://news.adidas.com/creating-lasting-change-now/honoring-black-excellence/s/75c5e3d7-ba3f-4e98-88ab-02f37cbaa37d>

1. Visuals/Images

In the first image CJ and Kelli are shown sitting on a bench in the baseball facility that has already been introduced in

earlier sequences. Kelli has a hand on CJ's leg and CJ has an arm around Kelli, which emphasizes their unity. The

picture shows the practice facility, and it is noticeable that there are clear signs of

use on the walls and pillars, symbolizing work and history on the one hand, and the need for renovation and scarcity of resources on the other. Interestingly, the perspective is such that the walls on the sides and the light bars converge towards the bright light at the end of the facility, and parallels with Nathaly's urban tunnel and Jackie's school corridors become apparent. The baseballs in the picture make it very clear that the sport is the means into the light (a bright future) for them. The second, third and fourth images are snapshots that are only shown for a few milliseconds but are still important because they reveal more about the characters and their environment. In the second image the two hold hands and look deeply into each other's eyes. This again shows their bond and with regard to the gray background in which a moving metro can be seen, shows their roots in the urban environment. The third image provides intimacy as both are shown in close-up and their smiling faces are in the spotlight as they look at each other. They both seem to be in love and the audience can closely feel their connection through the close-up. The fourth image shows their hands locked together and parts of their bodies from behind in the front of a path, symbolizing to the viewer that the two will go their symbolic journey together.

2. Sounds/Music

The quick succession of drumbeats makes the vibe very fast and dynamic. The clap noise that was present throughout the entire rhythm of the video became more intense in the last sequence and this rhythmic clap/drum noise can be perceived as a drum solo, similar to that of a marching snare drum instrument. To an

American sports fan, this drumming might remind one of a drum solo of a marching band typical of American sports, which are especially important in school and university sports because they provide musical accompaniment to these sporting events. Thus, within this video, especially in this sequence, a musical association with American sports is being created.

3. Colors

In terms of color, two schemes are apparent in this sequence: the background colors, as in many of the previous sequences in which the urban environment is in the focus, are predominantly gray brown, which is recognizable as a pattern, and which presents urbanity as a dreary place. Also as in previous sequences, in this sequence there are color accents that interrupt the gray tristesse, and which has a positive effect on the perception of the characters. In this case, it is the blue and red clothes that are clearly brought into focus by their brightness. According to Fusco, red stands for passion and love (2016), which are values that are also transferred to the characters through the images. Blue, on the other hand, stands for faith, loyalty, unity, and trust, which is also conveyed by the images. In addition to reinforcing the meaning creation, the bright colors bring the adidas apparel into view, making it clear that Adidas wants to be clearly associated with the protagonists, the project, and more generally with this environment.

5. Action/Gesture

As already outlined do CJ's and Kelli's gestures symbolize love, unity, closeness and affection which are expressively presented through their looks, hugging and hand holding.

Analysis

In this sequence, through the images and colors, the African-American couple is portrayed as a physically and especially emotionally close-knit team. In the gray urban environment, they stick together and face the challenges together. Baseball serves as their path to a brighter future.

Putting the focus on the sport of baseball in an African-American context is interesting to consider because "America's National Pastime" and African-

Americans have a distinctive history. Baseball has long been discredited as a "white sport," in part because, according to Britannica

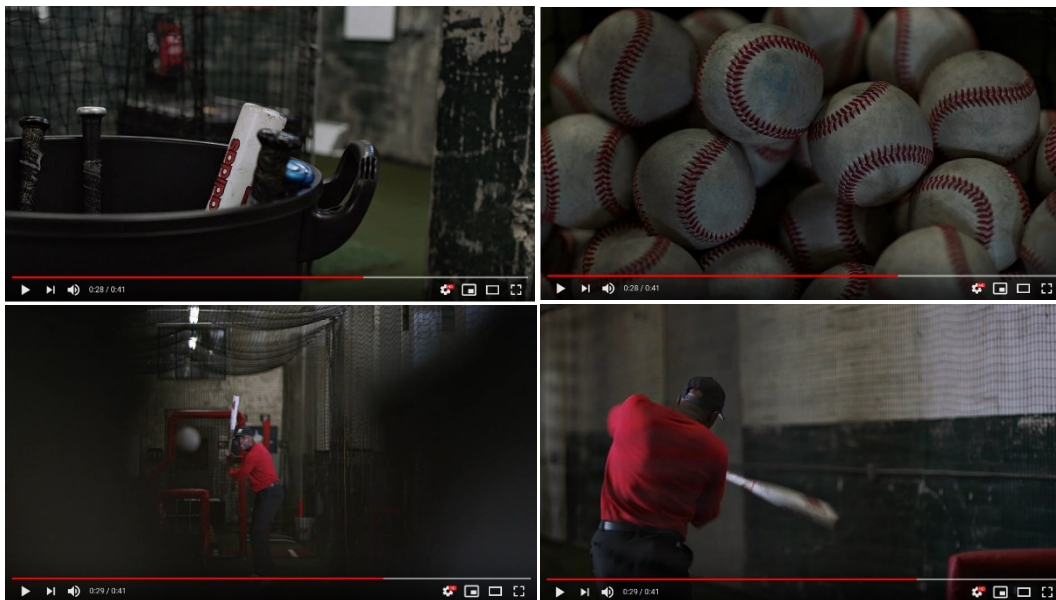
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"During baseball's infancy, a colour barrier was put up by the first formal organization of baseball clubs, the National Association of Base Ball Players, which decreed in 1867 that clubs "which may be composed of one or more coloured persons" should not be permitted to compete with its teams of gentlemen amateurs. When the first professional league was formed four years later, it had no written rule barring Black players, but it was tacitly understood that they were not welcome" (Britannica).

It took a long time for black players to establish themselves in the league, and today the Major League Baseball is a multicultural league, yet the focus on baseball in this video is symbolic, for baseball in particular, long being considered "white," now serves as a social steppingstone for Atlanta's urban African-American youth, made possible by, among others, CJ and Kelli, whose involvement is being honored in this video.

Data piece 11 – 00:28 - 00:29



Description

This sequence can be seen as a continuation of the previous one, as it follows on from it in terms of content and location. Instead of focusing on interhuman values, the focus here is on the sport of baseball, whose symbolic importance for the Afro-American community has already been emphasized. The first two photos are again presented as snapshots, and the bottom two images complete the sequence.

1. Visuals/Images

The first picture shows baseball bats wrapped with tape in a bucket. In the background you can see the worn walls of the facility. In the second picture you can see a bunch of used baseballs whose worn out condition is also clearly visible.

Both snapshots together therefore give the impression of hard work (of course also in respect to the sport), but also the hint to use limited means and to make the best out of the available resources. One piece is labeled with the name adidas, which signals the audience that the brand wants to be associated with what this sequence communicates.

In the last two pictures you can see a baseball coming out of a machine towards CJ. The first of these pictures is from the front perspective, the last picture shows CJ from the rear view as he hits the ball with force.

2. Sounds/Music

The clicking of the camera when the snapshots are shown creates drama. Halfway through the sequence, the metallic loading of the baseball throwing machine from which the ball is fired towards CJ and the subsequent flight of the ball can be heard. This adds to the drama. When CJ then hits the ball with the bat, the sound that is clearly recognizable to any sports fan is clearly audible, as only this sound can be heard and no background noise. This creates an acoustically induced finale to the sequence. This brings the drama to its climax for the time being.

3. Colors

The colors and their meaning follow on from the previous sequence. The dark green and gray, however, also represent the hard work of the facility, as do the gray marks of use on the baseballs. The dark green and gray, however, represent the ordinary, monotonous, and the red color of CJ's shirt interrupts this, highlighting his positive, special role in this environment, which shall be put attention to.

5. Action/Gesture

While waiting for the ball, CJ shows the typical stance of a batter awaiting the ball, underlining his concentration and preparation. The body language as he hits the ball signals commitment and determination.

Analysis

As an African-American individual, CJ is portrayed in this sequence through his actions and body language as focused and prepared. It also emphasizes his full commitment. The color scheme also emphasizes his special role in his environment and his work with baseball, as well as the modest means and hard work that create something special out of the dismal environment.

Data piece 12 – 00:30 - 00:32



Description

The transition from the previous sequence is CJ's batting of the baseball, the sound of which perceivably triggers the fluttering of these pigeons in the urban environment. The text "HERE, WE CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENT" appears in white letters.

1. Visuals/Images

In both pictures we see a grey-brown apartment building and brown empty trees. In the second picture there is what appears to be a gray lamppost in the foreground. The gray sky makes the scene appear gray and dreary, just as the urban environment has been depicted again and again in almost all of the previous sequences. In the foreground, however, is the fluttering swarm of gray, white and black pigeons, which embody urban city life, as the animals are familiar to most people from the big city. Furthermore, according to Katelyn Wilde, the symbolisms behind those animals run deep.

Mostly pigeons are associated with freedom and peace, but also symbolize among others prosperity, transformation persistence, harmony and well-being, mercy and forgiveness (Wilde 2021). Every viewer might assign a different meaning to

the birds, however contribute to meaning making in this sequence in an important way.

This sequence can also be seen as a tribute to the urban subculture of people who raise pigeons on rooftops (Berger 2013). Colin Jerolmack, an assistant professor of sociology at New York University makes the point that pigeon breeding brings “into contact with people of a different ethnic and age cohort with whom they were not voluntarily associating before.” In addition, he adds “African-Americans in Bed-Stuy [a Brooklyn, NY neighborhood] who mostly hang out with other African-Americans, because they keep pigeons wind up being friends with these 85-year-old white guys they would not usually associate with” (Berger 2013).

The oblique camera angle from which the sequence was shot is also striking, achieving a similar effect to that already achieved in Nathaly's Bronx sequence, namely signaling to the viewer that something in the world is in an awry state. The fluttering of the birds creates the impression that change is happening and that the impetus for a change for the better has been given.

2. Sounds/Music

As previously indicated, the baseball strike, similar to a shake-up, has the effect of signaling the beginning of change, in terms of the African-American context in which the video is set, that we begin to perceive and value African-American individuals differently. Second, the baseball strike serves as an end to the previous sequence and a release of the tension climax, leading to a different mood perception as only the fluttering of the pigeons can be heard. Additionally the sound of the baseball strike resembles the shot of a pistol, because the urban scenario plus the sound and the pigeons reminds the audience of the firing of a shot as depicted in many movies. So the resemblance of the powerful occurrence from movies makes the viewer think about the significance of sports, which serves as an effective means of persuasion.

3. Colors

The gray-brown symbolizes the urban environment.

4. Text

The textual modality "HERE, WE CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENT" clearly shows the viewer that adidas, the community and the audience (summarized in WE) (furthermore, the viewer is addressed with the we directly and put in a direct relationship to adidas and the characters in the video), celebrate achievement. The emphasis on achievement against the gray urban background further enhances the value of the actions of the characters previously staged in the video, as the environment shown is not necessarily being associated with success in the common mind.

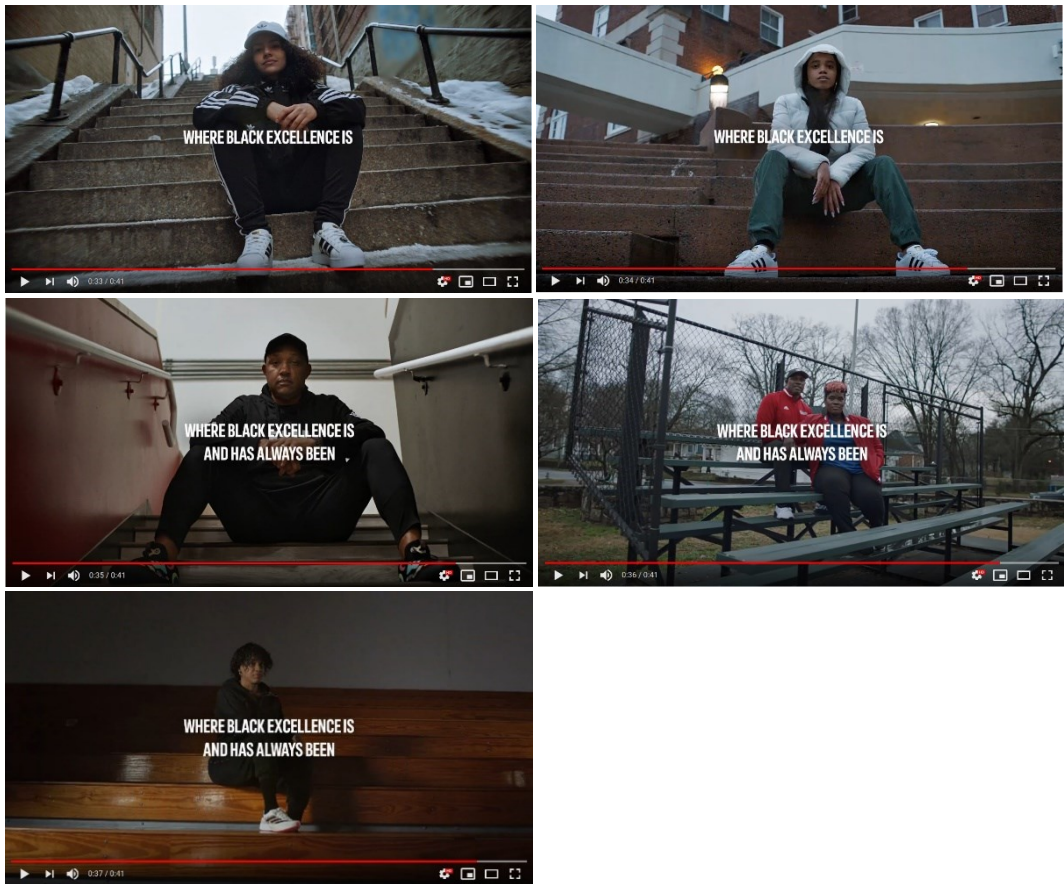
5. Action/Gesture

The flying of the pigeons in this sequence stands for both new beginnings and a tribute to urban subcultures.

Analysis

Largely because of the pigeons, this sequence can be seen as a celebration of urban life, as raising pigeons on rooftops helps break down racial barriers (Berger 2013), and as a tribute to urban subcultures that bring people together. In addition, new beginnings generated by sports and the appreciation of the achievements of the black actors in this video are portrayed multimodally.

Data piece 13 – 00:32 - 00:37



Description

This sequence focuses on the six characters in the video. They are shown in the environment of their surroundings. All characters take a sitting position on a staircase, and all are located in the center of the picture. The colors vary according to the image. The trap-inspired rhythm from the previous sequences resumes.

1. Visuals/Images

The first image in which Nathaly sits on the stairs in the urban environment is reminiscent of the first sequence with her, but the image looks friendlier because the light is brighter, which gives the image sequence with her a positive conclusion. It is noticeable that the stairs with the railing point to the light coming from the light gray sky. The railing on the sides is shaped in such a way that the

way up the stairs is clearly visible. The staircase stands for Nathaly's possibilities of rising and that she sits at the beginning of the staircase, means that she is far from being at the end of her path. The same goes for Alexis in the second image and Etop in the third. Moreover, since the three characters were shot from the low-angle, which makes them appear powerful and impressive. The different environments and different characters emphasize the different environments in which they are present and the different origins of each of them. Since there is no association with the sport that some of the characters were associated with in the sequences dedicated to them, the characters are depicted as simple people.

2. Sounds/Music

The trap inspired rhythm is picked up again in this sequence to end the video atmospherically the same way it started. In addition, the drum solo in this sequence is a salute to the characters.

3. Colors

In terms of color, it is obvious that all images appear dark. This is because the environments the characters are in are dominated by dark colors as well. For example, instead of being on a sunny court, Etop is now in the darkness of a staircase and Jackie is in the darkness of the gym despite the bright school corridor. This creates a contrast in atmosphere of what the audience has seen before. For the others, the sky is gray. In addition, the stairs on which the characters are sitting are all dark, which makes the mood in the images gloomy and depressed. In the context of the afro-american context, this means that all the characters, despite their efforts, are left in the dark or phrased differently, are seen in a bad light.

4. Text

The textual modality within this sequence reads "WHERE BLACK EXCELLENCE IS AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN". In relation to what is being seen, this means that black excellence is not always visible at first glance, and that outside their field of action, the magnificence of the characters' achievements and accomplishments is not appreciated. Moreover, the different places and characters in relation to the text

clearly illustrate that black excellence comes in a wide variety of forms and in many different places. The paragraph "and has always been" highlights the historical dimension, for example in basketball or baseball, where black athletes have not been recognized for their achievements for a long time. The sentence is also meaningful in relation to the depiction of the gray urban environment shown in the first two images, which is generally not associated with excellence, but the video aims at challenging this assumption.

5. Action/Gesture

All characters have a similar posture. The first three images show the characters sitting with their legs wide apart and their feet pointing outward. The hands hang loosely over the thighs in the middle in front of the body. In the two lower images, the characters are also seen seated, but slightly turned outward. The posture of all characters shows the viewer their self-confidence as well as their level of relaxation. It is also striking that all characters look directly into the camera, thus making direct contact with the viewer. This also demonstrates their self-confidence and is like an invitation to the viewer to form his or her own impression of the characters and to reflect once again on the image that we as viewers have received of them through the video. After all, the direct eye contact has a very personal effect.

Analysis

The atmosphere expressed by the colors and the fact that in this sequence there is no reference to the characters' area of influence suggests to the viewer that the characters are still unrecognized for their actions and are in the dark without their area of influence.

The fact that all characters sit on some kind of stairs also has symbolic meaning. On the one hand, stairs represent duality and contradiction, because as much as they represent passage for able-bodied folk, they represent blockage for other folks (The Industrial Historian). In the context of African American equality, the stairs represent on one hand the opportunities for social advancement, and on the other hand the obstacles in American society that make this difficult. Moreover, looking at the stairs, one gets the feeling that the protagonists are not yet at the

end of their journey, which is a fitting comparison in terms of African American emancipation.

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The characters are portrayed as confident and relaxed through their body language and challenge the viewer to reflect about what he/she has seen previously in regard to Black identity.

Data piece 14 – 00:38 - 00:41



Description

This sequence can be seen as the closing credits of the HBE video, because the campaign logo and the brand logo appear one after the other in white letters on a brown background. In the background, a gray-brown block of houses can be seen, and the sequence was apparently recorded from an elevator, as a vertical movement can be perceived. Musically, the familiar rhythm ends with a drum solo.

1. Visuals/Images

In the pictures there is a gray-brown block of housing similar to the ones we have seen in the previous urban sequences. The block does not look particularly shabby or well preserved, but it symbolizes the urban environment that was so often the focus of this video. There is also an empty tree in the image, which can mean that it is winter, and spring will come, when better times will dawn.

2. Sounds/Music

The drum solo at the end seems like a tribute to the characters and their achievements, reminiscent of the drumming from a marching band that accompanies a college or school sporting event, a quintessentially American tradition that once again establishes the connection between education and sports without explicitly expressing it.

3. Colors

The colors gray and brown are the colors that reflect the urban environment that was so often the focus of this video. The white color of the logos makes them easily recognizable without working with fancy color accents, which reflects the simplicity of the video as well as the down-to-earthness that is conveyed.

4. Text

The HBE logo can be seen in the first image, as well as the invitation to visit the campaign page on the Internet, which should remind the viewer once again of the name of the campaign and invite him to visit the website. The second image shows the familiar adidas logo to make it unmistakably clear to the viewer that this video is a video of the brand and that the adidas logo should be the last impression to be remembered, so that the viewer clearly associates what he or she has seen in the video and the takeaways with the brand.

5. Action/Gesture

It is noticeable that the sequence was shot from an elevator going up. This signals that things are improving in terms of Afro-American emancipation, i.e. that a positive development is taking place, which impression should ultimately stick with the viewer.

Analysis

The urbanity is once again in focus through the images and colors. Through the impression that it is winter and the elevator moving upwards from which the pictures were taken, the viewer is given the impression that better times will come and the development is pointing upwards. Through the integration of the logos, the experienced and the positive impression in association with the brand should be remembered. The drum rhythm with allusion to the connection between education and sport, which appears so important in the video, rounds off the video.

Discussion

The problem formulation underlying this project has been “How is black identity multimodally portrayed and how does Adidas’ “Honoring Black Excellence” social media advertising contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?”. The in-depth and systematic multimodal discourse analysis of the “Honoring Black Excellence” video has provided insightful findings in this regard.

As a first observation, it can be noticed that the producers of the video have effectively used different multimodal modes to create meaning individually on the one hand, or to reinforce or clarify the effect of another mode on the other hand. Each mode thus plays a twofold role in the multimodal portrayal of black identity. The rendered visuals/images create meaning in a variety of ways, and the meaning adjusts to the respective sequence through the multimodality in interaction with the other modes.

As illustrated in the beginning, the essence of the multimodal discourse analysis method is to investigate how meaning is created not only through one mode individually, but as the interplay of all modes simultaneously. Looking at the interplay of the different modes in the HBE video, one can see that several narratives where different African-American identities were on display in relation to the notions of education, sports, origin and lifestyle were presented. So, in other words black identity is being multimodally portrayed through the presentation of narratives which are dedicated to honor the characters and their activities.

Nathaly Delacruz’ narrative is shaped by a contrast. In her first sequence she is multimodally presented as the young, urban girl who through the images it appears can only achieve something by escaping the dark and shabby urban environment. The rattling sound and odd colors support that urban notion. Her negative body language signals her dissatisfaction. The text “WELCOME TO THE

KINGDOM” seems almost sarcastic. In her next sequence however she is still in the urban environment, but the meaning created is opposite to the previous one.

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Vibrant colors, a confident body position and the textual element "FROM THE COZY CORNERS OF THE BRONX" signal the viewer that life in urban areas like the Bronx does not need to be bad and negative and that African-American girls like Nathaly can be successful, confident and feel at home. Therefore stereotypes regarding African-Americans in urban communities are being challenged and reversed multimodally.

Jackie also features in two sequences. Through the interplay of the colors, and the orchestration of the image, a comparison is created between the environment of the school and the urban environment that was previously shown, so that the importance of the notion of education is impressively brought to expression in the first sequence through the visual parallelism. In her second sequence the clever arrangement of the images as well as the colors and Jackie’s actions indicate the viewer again that the path to a brighter future goes through education. The sound of the snapshots underline Jackie’s characterization as a black individual who despite her past athletic successes strives to help the community and is determined to change the present for a brighter future.

In her sequence Alexis is being portrayed through her actions and body language as a confident, determined young black woman. But she is also presented by the colors, perspectives and close up shots as a beautiful individual with an innocent and vulnerable side. Regarding the depiction of black identity, her sequence dispels the prejudice that if you come from an urban environment you automatically come across as tough, scruffy and untroubled. Rather, Alexis represents a city girl who is sensitive, pretty and looking to a bright future.

Etop’s sequence is characterized by two contrasts that make it valuable in terms of black identity portrayal. The first contrast is that in opposition to the other sequences, Etop’s part seems bright and rich. Through the choice of colors and the perspectives on the green nature, the colorful court and the blue sky happiness is created. The text "TO THE SUNNY COURTS OF LOS ANGELES" and the presentation of Etop who is from the infamous multicultural community Compton, contradicts numerous preconceptions about this community and its black residents. Instead

of making a run down or “ghetto” impression Etop is portrayed through his clothes and accessories as a well-dressed, successful black man with a connection to his sport. In addition, he comes across as in control, focused and confident through his body language and actions.

CJ and Kelli’s sequence portrays them through their actions, their facial expressions and their gestures as a loving and committed couple. Committed to each other and committed to the sport of baseball through which they light up their community, which is being communicated by the colors of their bright clothes in a grey and brown urban environment. Also their hard work in not so easy circumstances (which are symbolized by the traces of use in the pictures) is being honored through the video.

Additionally to the sequences that are dedicated to the personal narratives, there are some sequences like the first and last that are aimed to create meaning multimodally to not only create an intro and conclusion but to communicate further meaning in regard to African-American identity. In the first sequence the characters’ determination is showcased through their body language and furthermore it becomes clear that black excellence does not only exist in sports facilities but on the streets as well. In the conclusive sequence the characters are portrayed as confident through their body language as if they want to challenge the viewer to form an opinion about them and their achievements.

In addition to the personal narratives of the individuals that reflect black identity in a variety of ways, the characters’ various connections to sports and popular culture are repeatedly highlighted through the skillful use of multimodal resources. For example, the associations with baseball or basketball point to the African-American tradition in these sports, taking the video to a new level in terms of meaning, but at the same time highlighting the history of excellence of black athletes, which again highlights the relationship between black identity and athletic success. The same applies to Nathaly’s sequence, for example, in which cross-references to popular culture (hip-hop, fashion), geographical particularities (the Bronx) and African-American excellence are made clear.

The role of the modality music has to be emphasized as well as the trap inspired rhythm pays tribute to African-American music culture as well as to African-American urban culture throughout the video.

In regard to the second part of the problem formulation “how does Adidas’ “Honoring Black Excellence” social media advertising contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?” several theories and concepts have been introduced in the theory part of this project.

In the theory section it was outlined that black identity I.A. the meaning individuals and groups ascribe to membership in racial categories results from internal processes as individuals encounter external influences. Being confronted with the HBE commercial on social media as a black individual can be seen as such an external influence.

Social media in the form of platforms like Instagram, YouTube or the corporate website are essential for how Adidas contributes to black identity construction because they draw attention to the video clip and enable direct interaction between the brand, customers and stakeholders (including individuals from the black community) through which the audiences’ perceptions in regard to black identity are influenced.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement along with the zeitgeist in which the new generation of customers, millennials and post-millennials not only expect the brands they buy to support social causes (Jenkins 2018: Web) but demand a clear orientation of brands in regard to the movement. With this video, Adidas clearly takes a stand in support of the movement and also highlights its tradition in relation to African American identity and the brands' current efforts. So Adidas’ marketing efforts are affected by the BLM movement insofar that the brand showcases its responsible actions and that they take a clear standpoint, but also that the brand wants to represent positive behaviors and to be standing for change.

In regard to black identity construction Black Lives Matter is about fostering social change in regard to the situation of Black people in the United States and the sense of Black identity and the group’s image is equally at focus as the individuals’ identification and solidarity with the group. From the video we can see that the multimodal portrayal of black identity can have a positive influence on the individual’s black identity and the groups’ collective black identity. This is going to

be explained through social identity theory, which has been outlined as a crucial concept for the creation of someone's identity as it states that individuals take part in the creation of their own racial identity. Furthermore, the development of an individual self-identity is inseparable from the parallel development of collective social identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 133). This problematic relationship has been described as the internal-external dialectic of identification by Jenkins (1996), who maintains that self-identity must be validated through social interaction and that the self is embedded in social practices (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 133). Watching the positive depictions of black individuals in the video and interacting in the social environment that has been created by the brand on social media to foster change and positively influence individuals in that space are the practices that an individual uses to assess his/her racial identity.

In the context of the BLM movement it has been argued that there are three identity management strategies to improve social identity. Adidas' HBE commercial is designed to (within the community) work together, as Adidas creates the feeling of being on the same team with the viewer, to redefine and improve perceptions of the African-American group. When fostering social change like BLM intends to do, social movement research suggests that group identification is crucial for creating solidarity and commitment and in turn sparking collective action (Snow & Benford, 1992 as in Harlow & Benbrook 2019: 356/357). Adidas positive depictions of black individuals as well as the African-American community confirms an individuals' desire to maintain positive ingroup status and thus enhances a viewers' degree of identification with the African-American community.

In the section on the connection between social identity and the media the need for quality depictions of one's ingroup has been outlined. Instead of celebrities Adidas incorporates local heroes like Etop, Jackie or persons unknown to the public like Nathaly or Alexis who are portrayed favorably in a variety of ways which is likely also be perceived by viewers as successful and possessing numerous desirable attributes (McKinley et al 2014: 3) which makes them individuals that serve as a symbolic reference group one wishes to aspire to (Lafferty, Goldsmith & Newell, 2002 as in McKinley et al 2014: 3).

The HBE clip has further significance for the construction of black identity among its audience because of the fact that it represents and comes from the brand Adidas. In the section that describes the connection between social identity and brands it has been outlined that endeavors to create one's self-identity often involve the consumption of products, services and media. Adidas' HBE can be found at the crossection of those as Adidas products are on display in a service from Adidas to its followers distributed on social media.

The dialectical tension that exists in the meaning making process in regard to Adidas' HBE clip and black identity that requires active negotiation (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998: 133) between the various actors as outlined in the theory happens in favor of Adidas because of the emotional connection that exists between many viewers and the brand. That connection has been established through both lived (i.e., purchase and usage) and mediated experiences (i.e., advertising and promotion) but HBE of course also adds to this connection and makes use of it at the same time, because it reflects customers' core values which are portrayed multimodally and through the characters, that "capture and communicate values that customers hold dear" (Berry 2000, p. 34 as in Underwood et al. 2001: 1). Furthermore because of this connection, individuals who identify highly with the brand are likely to view the content created by the brand as personally relevant and thus process it deeply. In this way Adidas HBE video becomes a resource for one's own identity construction.

The HBE video is effective in contributing to black identity construction because cultural meanings like the importance of sports and education or the connection to one's origin or area which are presented multimodally are not only taken from the consumer's world view and invested into the commercial as narratives, but additionally are based on the real lives of black individuals through the country, which makes the meanings created authentic and effective. In a cyclical flow those meanings are then interpreted and used by consumers to construct internally their racial identity. Because of the variety of narratives within HBE and the portrayal of black identity in various multimodal ways it is likely that many black viewers find themselves in some way in the video, develop pride and feel inspired by the HBE

clip in a way that the video serves the African-American audience as a symbolic resource for identity construction in times of the BLM movement.

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Conclusion

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This project was designed to explore the research question “How is black identity multimodally portrayed and how can Adidas’ “Honoring Black Excellence” social media campaign contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?”

In the introduction, the foundation for the success of the project was laid as the variables involved in the problem formulation were introduced and put into context.

First, the context in which the project is situated, that of the Black Lives Matter Movement in the United States, was explained. Next, the connection that has been established between sports, brands and the black equality movement, especially promoted by the American sportswear company Nike, was introduced. Next, the zeitgeist was addressed, which for corporate entities means increasing pressure to take a clear stand on the events in regard to racial violence and the Black Lives Matter movement. The resulting importance for marketing, also for Nike's German main competitor, Adidas, was highlighted. The interrelationships described gave rise to the question of the extent to which marketing efforts could really contribute to improving the situation for African-Americans in the USA. Consequently, the link to black identity was established and illustrated in the problem formulation. In addition, the video that has been used to answer the problem formulation was presented and it was explained why Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" video was interesting for this project. At the end of the introduction, the method that was seen as most suitable for answering the questions resulting from the problem formulation was presented, Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

In the theory section, the need to address some theoretical notions and concepts essential for answering the research questions was resolved. The notion of Contemporary Black Identity development in the United States was presented first. Also the concept of social identity, especially in relation to racial identity, was presented, as this concept was seen as an essential fundament for the project. Then theories were presented that illustrate the connection between marketing, social media, advertising, brands and their

influence on the creation of (black) social/racial identity. This was designed to provide the basis for analyzing the collected data, Adidas' HBE spot, in terms of the concepts that contribute to understanding the context as well as the intricacies of the interplay of marketing, racial identity, and sports.

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As the next part, the methodology section contributed to place this project in an academic tradition, among other things by presenting philosophical considerations, and by presenting the structured way of working that was the basis of the project, to be able to achieve results regarding answering the research question. The methodology section was therefore divided into the four segments epistemology, ontology, research design and delimitations, in order to demonstrate how the chosen problem would be approached and consequently critically examined.

The analysis part, in which the data corpus Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" spot was analyzed in regard to the research question "How is black identity multimodally portrayed and how can Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" social media campaign contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?" can be considered the heart of this research project, because the application of the Multimodal Discourse Analysis method could reveal a number of findings regarding the two questions that together constitute the problem formulation.

As an initial finding, it was revealed that black identity has been multimodally portrayed through the creation of seven different narratives that honor the commitment, lives, and accomplishments of the characters. All narratives tell their own story and represent different characteristics that are part of the black identity of each character. The characteristics displayed range from determination, focus, self-confidence, confidence, and optimism, to name just a few.

As a second finding, it was revealed that the producers of the video used its multimodal nature in a variety of ways to communicate meaning regarding the portrayal of black identity. It is noticeable that individual modes communicate meaning both on their own and in conjunction with other modes to communicate a message in a more emotional and impactful way.

With regard to the second part of the research question, "How can Adidas' "Honoring Black Excellence" social media campaign contribute to black identity construction in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement?" the multimodal discourse analysis revealed that Adidas, through the multimodal presentation of different African-American characters with different origins, different spheres of influence, and different natures, presents positive attributes of black identity to the African-American viewers of the HBE spot in the most distinctive ways. By presenting the positive influence of African-American individuals in an appealing and authentic way, Adidas uses its brand appeal to enable viewers to draw positive conclusions about their African-American identity. The effect is reinforced by several factors, which are also referred to multimodally in the video. For many people, Adidas as a brand has a significance that goes beyond that of a clothing and sporting goods manufacturer. Through mediated and lived experiences, consumers have built positive connotations with the brand. In this way, the brand, as well as its messages communicated through marketing campaigns on social media, for example, acts as a symbolic resource that consumers can use to construct their understanding of their reality and their identity within it.

In the discussion section that followed the analysis part, the results were presented once again and put into context with the theories and notions presented in the theory part, in order to provide a perspective to look at the results of this research project in a more comprehensive way.

In conclusion, multimodal discourse analysis has proven to be an excellent tool for identifying the many hidden and subtle ways in which meaning is created multimodally to communicate meaning through the portrayal of black identity.

Appendix

adidas Honoring Black Excellence

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3id3xTc56w>

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