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MASTER'S THESIS

What theatrical elements are utilized in Tik-Tok videos to engage audiences with the Black Lives Matter movement?

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Epigraph

"To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters, and conditions of man.

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us

…

For there is always light,

if only we're brave enough to see it.

If only we're brave enough to be it."

(Gorman, 2021)

Abstract

This thesis presents an investigation of the theatrical elements utilized in Tik-Tok videos to engage audiences with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Following the death and murder of George Floyd in 2020, the BLM movement surged and sparked an internet frantic, causing people to use TikTok as a platform of expression. Operating with critical literacy and multimodal discourse analysis, 35 TikTok videos are analyzed quantitatively, while five of them are evaluated through the qualitative method of analysis. This mixed method ensures a reliable and valid data sample while answering a variety of research questions. The quantitative method recognizes the specific features and the frequency of which the features occur, while the qualitative analysis assesses their potential effect on the audience. The effect of the visual, audible, and theatrical components are built on Judith Butler's assumption that humans only act when they are affected emotionally. This meets the aim of using critical literacy in TikTok videos to engage people to become activists. This emotional response is related to the theatrical components, in which the objective is for the audience to reflect upon the topic presented in relation to their own lives. In other words, the TikTok videos are being analyzed as a play being performed.

The purpose of the study is to identify the visual and audible elements present in the videos that affect the theatrical elements of expression. The research focuses on the visual and audible elements as branches of the theatrical expression, with the ultimate goal of discovering what *truths* unfold in the TikTok videos.

The quantitative findings show that the most prominent features are action (body language) and word choice (verbal and written text). The most-viewed videos included the demand gaze, an effective tool in breaking the fourth wall and engaging the audience. The least-viewed videos excluded features such as the demand gaze and close-up shots. Consequently, these elements focus on details and allow us to draw a correlation between the most-viewed videos and the importance of showing details to captivate the audience. The theme of identity and power emerges from the qualitative analysis. This investigation will explore the meaning behind this theme and how it connects to the audience. Correspondingly, it shows the tremendous viable impact of reaching large audiences, and the valuable message conveyed in these TikTok videos.

Norwegian summary

Denne oppgaven utforsker hvilke teater-elementer som er brukt i TikTok videoer for å engasjere publikum i Black Lives Matter (BLM) bevegelsen.

Formålet med studien er å identifisere både de visuelle elementene og lydelementene som benyttes i videoene som påvirker teateruttrykket. Oppgaven setter søkelys på de visuelle og lydbare elementene som grener av teater-komponentene, i undersøkelsen av hvilken *sannhet* som kan avdekkes i TikTok-videoene.

Gjennom *kritisk literacy* og *multimodal diskurs analyse*, ble 35 TikTok videoer analysert etter kvantitativ metode. Fem TikTok videoer ble i tillegg analysert etter kvalitativ metode. Miks-metoden er tatt i bruk for å undersøke graden av valide og pålitelige resultater. Den kvantitative metoden er benyttet for å forsøke å gjenkjenne de spesifikke visuelle og lydbare egenskapene. I tillegg har jeg forsøkt å se på i hvilket omfang slike egenskaper blir benyttet. Jeg benytter kvalitativ metode for å se på mulige effekter av disse spesifikke visuelle og lydbare egenskapene. Undersøkelsen av effekter tar utgangspunkt i Judith Butlers antakelse om at mennesker bare handler når de er følelsesmessig påvirket. Jeg legger til grunn at et av formålene med disse TikTok-videoene er å engasjere folk til å bli aktivister. Den emosjonelle responsen er knyttet til teater-komponentene, der målet er at publikum skal reflektere over BLM temaet og hvordan det kan relateres til eget liv. Med andre ord; TikTok-videoene blir analysert som et skuespill som blir fremført.

De kvantitative funnene viser at de mest fremtredende trekkene er handling (kroppsspråk) og ordvalg (verbal og skriftlig tekst). De mest sette videoene inkluderte direkte øyekontakt i kamera, et effektivt verktøy for å bryte «den fjerde veggen» og engasjere publikum. De minst sette videoene inneholdt ikke funksjoner som direkte øyekontakt og nærbilder. Disse elementene setter søkelys på detaljer og tegner en sammenheng mellom de mest viste videoene og viktigheten av å vise detaljer for å engasjere publikum. Temaet identitet, rase og makt blir utdypet ved bruk av den kvalitative metoden, og utforsker meningen bak disse temaene. For å konkludere: Studien viser den sannsynlige påvirkningen ved å nå et stort publikum, og belyser de viktige temaene som formidles i disse TikTok-videoene.

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1. Introduction

This thesis is an analysis of how theatrical elements are utilized in TikTok-videos to engage audiences in the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). The main objective of the study is to examine the role of various theatrical components of expression in TikTok-videos and explore how effective they are in presenting both emotional- and literal information regarding the current situation of BLM. The presumption is based on Judith Butler's claim that "we only act when we are moved to act" (Butler, 2012, p. 136). The purpose of the videos is to activate emotional responses, and as a result encourage viewers to become activists. Accordingly, the following research questions were addressed.

1) What theatrical elements of expression are utilized in TikTok-videos to engage an audience?
2) What characteristics describe the most-viewed BLM videos on TikTok?
3) How do the theatrical elements of expression utilized present the themes of identity and power?
4) What insight does a critical literacy approach provide to the BLM movement on Tik Tok?

The material for this investigation consists of analyzing TikTok-videos published between 2020 and 2023, in which the topic of racism, and the BLM movement is visually presented and discussed. Medietilsynet (2022) presented data claiming 73% of Norway's youth from 9-18 years old are on TikTok (p.1). TikTok is an app showcasing short-form videos disclosing information or entertainment on various topics using numerous visual elements. These elements include using voiceovers, music, stickers, text, and filters (Herrman, 2019). The app was released in 2018 and has become one of the most popular web domains with an estimate of 1 billion active monthly users in 150 countries (Doyle, 2023). The popularity of the app can be attributed to features like free access, a global audience, and algorithmic observations. The algorithmic sequence determines what videos will show up in a user's feed. The users use hashtags to label their videos and will therefore contribute and discover similar videos with the same topic of interest. The videos I have chosen for my analysis have been found using the

hashtags #BLM and #BlackLivesMatter, in which the most viewed and relevant videos were chosen for analysis. The features included in the videos will be analyzed using a mixed method approach. A qualitative approach was adopted to create an extensive description of the videos and the visual, audible, and theatrical elements displayed. The quantitative data examines the statistics of tendency of certain features in the videos, such as gaze, positioning, camera angle, sound patterns and color scheme. Through this method, a generalization of the most effective features can be made. These categories of theatrical elements can enable one to draw conclusions of how elements engage and communicating important topics of social injustice with their audience.

Although the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was initiated in 2017, the "struggle is as old as America itself" (Lebron, 2017, p. 13). The term racism evokes a "wide array of social phenomenon" and appeals to systematic and institutional inequality, racial attitudes, and stereotypes (Shiao & Woody, 2020, p. 495). Furthermore, racism constitutes the attitudes, culture and structures within society where racial discrimination occurs (Shiao & Woody, 2020, p. 496). The BLM movement was first initiated after the murder of Trayvon Martin. Trayvon Martin was a seventeen-year-old American teenager strolling in a neighborhood in Florida, in the United States of America. A neighborhood watcher, George Zimmermann, shot an unarmed Trayvon "walking while black" (Lebron, 2017, p. 6). The American civil rights activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, initiated the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter as a response when George Zimmerman was acquitted and not held accountable for his crime (Carney, 2016, p. 181). The BLM movement is a social movement that can be deployed by any individual or group that seeks to challenge racial injustice. BLM has become more than a social media hashtag and aims at challenging philosophical and political systems, as well as racial disbeliefs. When George Floyd was murdered in 2020, the BLM movement escalated, initiating protests and responses around the world, including on TikTok and other social media platforms. Whereas the movement was constructed in the US, racial discrimination continues to be a global issue.

"The world remains as it is — until we question it" (Kulick, 2020, p. 8).

If we examine the current situation of the world, it becomes apparent that our world consists of juxtapositions. It is the co-existence of racism and diversity, lack of women's rights and the prevalence of an increasing number of female leaders, global warming preventive actions but increased CO_2 outlets, all in the same realm. The world consists of opposites, some depending on geographical position, while others exist within the same borders. How do we question norms of social injustice that are embedded and inconspicuous in our society?

Although the BLM movement peaked in 2020, there has been opposition to racial injustice for as long as the issue itself has existed. Nonetheless, the opposition and protests have changed form in our technological decade. Social media platforms are actively used to inform, persuade, and engage, where all citizens have a voice and the chance of being heard. Carney (2016) argues how especially "...youth of color used technology to influence dominant discourse in the nation" (p. 181). For example, the BLM movement challenges the stereotypical assumption of black men from low-income areas being criminals (Carney, 2016, p. 182). The numerous platforms of social media have become an "emerging public sphere where... [the] discourse on race unfolds" (Carney, 2016, p. 182-183). Social media is a dynamic sphere, as its use and effect advances over time. Furthermore, the audience of the public sphere plays an imperative role in the objective of the media (Carney, 2016, p. 183). The aim of the information and how the TikTok makers deliver the message is based on their intended audience. On the other hand, Dahlgren (1995) argues we cannot choose our audience but should aspire and hope to recruit active social agents rather than a passive audience. Smith et al. (2014) inform how people being exposed to the same social media content about BLM and police brutality may still interpret it differently, based on their prior knowledge and sociocultural factors. This thesis will explore the tools of theatrical, audible, and visual components that impart knowledge and explore the power of presenting a discourse on TikTok. Although the public sphere of TikTok does not remedy the struggles of racial injustice, it attempts to engage an audience who alternatively

would not participate (Carney, 2016, p. 184). There is value in every mind being challenged to acknowledge and beware of systematic discrimination.

Education in our multicultural society should aim at "learning about others to standing with others", through the development of pupils' cultural, empathic, and emotional competence (Habegger-Conti, 2021, p. 54, 56). To limit the gap between people, cultures, and borders, we must recognize human vulnerability, which is the "impetus for seeking to make all lives livable" (Butler, 2012, p. 145). Generally, there has been a tendency to focus on differences and 'othering', rather than acknowledging the interconnectedness of people. Until we acknowledge how individual identities and social roles prevent our efforts to reform, we will never be part of the solution (Habegger-Conti, 2021, p. 2021). Connecting with people from across the globe can help students become open-minded, and this can easily be done using various social media platforms. In addition, the purpose of education is for students to become critical thinkers and question their surroundings. *Norges offentlige utredninger (NOU)* states that the Norwegian curriculum must adhere to the societal and cultural developments in society, such as the increase of the multicultural population (2015, p. 8). One of the objectives of the English subject, is to "...develop the pupils' understanding that their views of the world are culture-dependent... and help to prevent prejudice" (*Utdanningsdirektoratet*, 2020b). The perspective of the world is heavily influenced by the media which is the most influential platform in the world. Screens offer a version of reality and can act as "mirrors through which [people] can see themselves" (Habegger- Conti, 2021, p. 55). This relates to the findings by *Forskning.no*, which offers a potential explanation why young adults predominantly watch news on Snapchat or TikTok (2020). Accordingly, TikTok is the preferred platform to analyze for BLM representations and youth engagement.

The topic of racism and BLM will raise awareness of white supremacy and ethical obligations of white people. I recognize that I as a white woman will never understand the depth of the issue, nor the individual scars of racism. Despite my ethnicity and lack of personal experience with the issue, it is still my obligation as a fellow citizen to recognize and act against this social issue.

Through this thesis, I will shed light on racism, and how social media platforms can assist in spreading awareness and immerse people from across the globe. My educational background included attending an international school where being in a multicultural classroom greatly influenced me. I remember vividly our principal looking at us and reflecting upon "if the world reciprocated the behavior and respect between nationalities and race shared in this room, the world would look very different". This utterance has stuck with me and has been a motivating force when conducting this research. In addition, the International Baccalaureate literature course influenced my decision to analyze the TikTok videos from a theatrical angle, as examining theatrical pieces and conventions was a part of the course. This thesis therefore both creates new knowledge and builds on my former knowledge and experience.

This thesis is structured in five parts. The theoretical chapter following the introduction presents previous research on the topic of multimodality, critical visual literacy and elaborates on how theatrical components can be applied when analyzing TikTok videos. The methodology chapter justifies how the data corpora has been collected and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The ethical guidelines for conducting research are also considered. Chapter four presents the findings and discussion of the corpora, in which the data sample is analyzed according to the theatrical, audible, and visual features. At the end of chapter four, there is a summary connecting the processed data to the theoretical considerations presented in chapter two and attempts to answer the research questions presented in chapter one. The last chapter provides the overall conclusion of the study, summarizing the most prominent findings, and suggests further research potential.

2. Theoretical orientation

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical background guiding this research. The two central theories chosen for this study are critical visual literacy and the multimodal text. Critical visual literacy explores the cause-and-effect relationship of the individual features. A critical visual literacy approach also explores the concept of social justice through highlighting the perspectives being conveyed through the TikTok videos. On the other hand, the theoretical lens

of multimodal literacy can help to better understand the visual, audible, and theatrical elements of expression, and how they can be identified in a multimodal text.

2.1 Multimodality

Multimodality is a term that includes all the modes which affect the theatrical elements of expression. It has become a new term that broadens our perspective of the media, as the mediums have become components with functions of persuasion and intention, and not simply conveying information. Multimodal ensembles incorporate various modes, which are "system of visual and verbal entities" (Serafini & Gee, 2013, p. 12). These modes combine to create multimodal configurations in both printed and digital spheres. The different notions of modes applied are light, text, sound, and images. The objective of analyzing multimodal texts is to interpret how signs work individually and combined with other mechanisms of expression (Janks et al, 2014, p. 2). To analyze a multimodal text is to explore the relationship between different modes and determine their message.

There are numerous principles to contemplate when analyzing a multimodal text. First, multimodal ensembles are only a partial representation of a preserved 'truth' and contain bias. The texts are not neutral and positioned by their producer to convey the message intended (Janks et al, 2014, p. 2). Furthermore, the style and word choices in text are often consciously made by the producer. Roswell (2012) argues we must examine how the content producers "privilege one or more modes" (p. 4). When we examine the choices that have been selected in the text, it also makes us aware of what modes have been excluded, giving us a sense of whose voice and perspective is being told. Analyzing a multimodal text prompts the question of "whose interests are being served?" (Janks et al, 2014, p. 1). As a result, when multiple modes are used in a text, it has the potential to impart multiple meanings. Lewison et al (2002) views "literacy as a form of cultural citizenship" (p. 383). This is also claimed by Janks et al (2014), who claim "texts have social effects" (p. 1). The numerous versions of texts offer their own interpretation of the truth, inviting the reader/viewer to experience a dilemma through their vision.

As the study regards images and moving images, there are several relevant theories that will act as the framework for my thesis to answer the research questions presented. The representation theory by Stuart Hall claims no text is neutral and serves as the foundation for my investigation. The skill to uncover the hidden meanings and intentions of a text is highlighted as a competence aim in the English subject, as students are expected to "read factual texts and assess the reliability of the sources" (*Utdanningsdirektoratet*, 2020a). To be able to analyze multimodal texts, I will apply the theories of c*ritical visual literacy* (Janks, 2014) and *reading images* (Kress van Leeuwen, 2020). Furthermore, these theories highlight the various modes that are incorporated in multimodal texts, introducing both *visual elements* (Serafini, 2013) and *theatrical elements of expression* (Kulick, 2020). My focus will be on the theatrical elements of expression, as they offer a transmutation of the real world, called *mimesis*, a mirroring of our reality (Kulick, 2020, p. 19). A play is built upon sequential moments that are meant to raise questions about the world as it is (Kulick, 2020, p. 8). Theatre can slow down these moments, demanding reflection between the shifts of moments. Moments change rapidly and aspire to address the "variety of different emotive locations within ourselves" (Kulick, 2020, p. 49).

These discoveries often uncover the overall objective which is to question the complex nature of mankind. Kulick (2020) claims human beings "contain a multitude of oppositions within us", which makes us susceptible to various perspectives (p.61). Receptivity is one of the constituent factors to empathize with others (Butler, 2012, p. 136). We must be open-minded to new ideas and perspectives. Theatre offers multiple perspectives, which helps us portray a more accurate image of how our world works (Kulick, 2020, p. 76). The plays "allows us to return to our world with fresh eyes", leaving an impression (Kulick, 2020, p. 82). Consequently, a play can have potential social effects on the world as it engages its audience. The sliding door concept breaks the barrier between the audience and the medium of representation by inviting the viewer into another world, allowing them to be part of the experience (Janks et al, 2014, p. 56). Henceforth, *the sliding door concept* (Bishop, 1990) will help understand how these modes of expression engage the audience and trigger emotional reactions. Kulick (2020) pinpoints that the world

does not only influence us, but we influence the world (p. 66). Henceforth, multimodal texts have the potential to influence social issues.

Multimodal texts, such as images, have the capacity to portray and influence our perception of social issues. Certain images invoked upon us, "operate as an ethical solicitation" to compel our emotions (Butler, 2012, p. 135). An image being able to act as an ethical obligation is another foundation of my study, in which the objective is to investigate how "bonds of solidarity emerge across space and time" when exposed to images concerning social issues (Butler, 2012, p. 135). In other words, how can the critical literacy approach to multimodal texts engage students to become justice-oriented citizens, addressed by research question four. Butler (2012) questions whether nearness is a precondition for acting. The larger the geographical proximity of national and linguistic borders, the more ethical obligation delimits (Butler, 2012, p. 137). Global proximity has decreased due to technological innovation and advancement over the past decades. We can conveniently connect with others from across the globe. Therefore, TikTok is highly relevant platform to investigate in my thesis, as it can be accessed from almost every country in the world and reaches a global audience. The BLM movement initiated in the US sparked a global engagement, showcasing the relevance of social media platforms in conveying information and captivating an audience. As it has become distinctively easier to connect with other experiences through social media, can we as easily disconnect when social issues arise and question our role in society. This concept links to the research questions regarding critical literacy and its attempt to disrupt the commonplace and uncover sociopolitical issues. Also, the research question depicting theme of identity and racial injustice relates directly to the global audience, as they can identify with human emotions, such as anger and despair, demonstrated in the videos. Empathy across physical and figurative borders is a question of ethical relations. Levinas (1989) claims ethical relations are precontractual and do not depend on similar marks between various cultures (cited in Butler, 2012, p. 140). There lies an effect when realizing a "certain intertwinement between ...all those other lives, and my own" (Butler, 2012, p. 140). The global engagement shows ethics exceeds egoism, and we

engage when we grasp the understanding that "here" is already an "elsewhere" (Butler, 2012, p. 150).

2.2 Critical Visual Literacy

The purpose of this thesis is to use the theory of critical literacy to analyze the various tools used in TikTok videos to emphasize the topic of BLM. The main objective of critical literacy is to investigate texts by understanding the text's cultural, social, and political position by applying different sign systems to "recognize implicit modes of perception" (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 383). As a result, a new framework can be created in which new perspectives are developed. Being able to uncover the meaning behind current knowledge is to view the texts as historical products. In other words, critical literacy is defined as investigating language and how it is applied in various contexts (Janks et al, 2014, p. 1). Another aim is to teach students to become "actively engaged in texts" (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 384). There are numerous definitions of critical literacy, and it is therefore represented in The Four Dimensions model. This model will help determine which videos were chosen for the data sample and to what extent they use The Four Dimensions model to exhibit the sociopolitical issue of BLM.

The first dimension is called *disrupting the commonplace*. This dimension attempts to analyze the cultural and social discourses in society by interrogating the texts and the way the authors use language to communicate the status quO (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 383). Janks et al (2014) argue text "positions are not neutral" and seek to place the reader according to their intention (p. 12). Furthermore, the dimension seeks to view all "existing knowledge as a historical product" (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 383). Creating a distance between the current standard and putting it in historical context makes it easier to find new perspectives on the matter and "seeing the everyday through new lenses" (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 386). In other words, this dimension concerns identifying social issues and publicizing them as widely as possible.

Interrogating multiple viewpoints is the second dimension. This dimension aims to highlight the voices in the text: who is represented and who is marginalized. Moreover, this dimension appeals to recognizing that perspectives are not treated equally, as some are more privileged

than others. According to Harse et al. (2000) recognizing different perspectives is about "making difference visible" (cited in Lewison et al, 2002, p. 383). An example of this point coincides with the ongoing effort to highlight more diversity in children's books, as research shows it is easier for children to identify with central characters that resemble themselves. In addition, we explore our ability to empathize and envision other narratives that do not necessarily correspond with our own nor the majority's.

The third dimension focuses on confronting sociopolitical issues. This dimension examines the intertwined relationship between power, language, and sociopolitical systems (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 383). The objective is to recognize the social and cultural norms which are embedded in our culture and contributing to "larger social structures" (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 387). One of the issues to highlight is unequal power relations, often identified by the language. It is either the language used *about* someone or used *by* someone that can pinpoint an implicit power status. For example, the language used by men to write about women may contrast with how women portray themselves. We use critical literacy to investigate the authors, their intentions and to uncover sociopolitical issues. What makes the TikTok videos that portray BLM so appealing is how they give a voice to those who have been silenced for centuries.

Lastly, *taking action and promoting social justice* is the fourth dimension. Janks (2000) argues how "social action can change existing discourses" in society. Hence, every citizen is responsible for challenging social and cultural norms that no longer serve their purpose. There are several ways to achieve social justice. The first step is reflecting upon how various groups are treated in our society and starting to transform it. Thus, it is essential to question how language is used as a tool to manipulate and maintain power. This knowledge will help us understand "why certain groups are positioned as Others" (Lewison et al 2002, p. 384). Others is a term invented to convey the act of categorizing people who are different than oneself and that present a threat to one´s identity. This difference "results in the construction of hierarchies" by exclusion and creating metaphorical barriers (Janks et al, 2014, p. 7).

The central argument of critical literacy is that "texts are culturally, socially, politically, and historically constructed and situated" (Lewison et al, 2002, p. 390). Carole Edelsky (1999) supports this claim and suggests few people are aware of "the socio-political systems of meaning that are operating" in the numerous varieties of texts (cited in Vasquez, Tate & Harste, 2013, p. 6). As a result, the classroom will offer an arena for recognizing, reflecting, and discussing texts. It is the "space of the possible" (Davis & Sumara, 1999, cited in Lewison et al, 2002, p. 387). In other words, a change is originally initiated by a few people, before appealing social change to the rest of society. Critical literacy teaches students that small changes of mindset and behavior in a classroom does matter. In addition, students must explore the social structures beyond the surface. Social structures can be identified through the interrelation between language and power. Gee (1999) emphasizes how power is both visible and created through language (cited in Vasquez et al., 2013, p. 10). How the reader is positioned and affected by the language in a text creates a mental framework for how we view the world (Vasques et al., 2013, p. 8). An objective of the education system is "educating for democracy" and for students to become justice-oriented citizens (Vasquez et al., 2013, p. 6). Education aims at disrupting "our tendency to provide easy answers to complex problems", such as the root and solution to institutional racism (Vasquez et al., 2013, p. 12).

Exploring social conventions is necessary to challenge complex issues, such as racism, that are imbedded in our society. Judith Butler (2012) explains that "without that plurality against which we cannot choose, we have no freedom and, therefore, no choice" (Butler, 2012, p. 143). In other words, for humans to experience freedom, another area must be bound by rules or social conventions to create the contrast. Furthermore, people must acknowledge the area of the importance of freedom, and which domains should be governed by the state or social norms. Critical literacy can be a tool when examining these jurisdictional and social rules which create an unequal hierarchy. However, racial injustice should not be one of those conditions where freedom is not provided to all citizens.

While critical literacy focuses on the cultural and social context, critical visual literacy is a branch deriving from the same objective as critical literacy but entails how the visual modes portray social and political ideologies (Brown, 2021, p. 25). Critical visual literacy works to question diversity, access, and power in multimodal texts (Janks, 2014, p. 5). The images in multimodal texts only portray a "portion of reality" and may showcase visual stereotypes of race (Ferreira & Newfield, 2014, p. 90). Critical literacy aims at recognizing the visual stereotypes as they permeate numerous multimodal texts.

The language in multimodal texts can be used as a tool to uncover and give power to certain groups, both in the media and in real- life situations. A linguistic aspect to explore is whose perspective and whose voice is displayed. For example, newspapers in the UK have a political viewpoint that determines their angle when presenting news. Janks et al (2014) argues that the media's aim is to persuade people to "consent to society's rules" (p. 5). A deliberate action by the text producers to maintain the existing rules of social institutions is hidden in the linguistic choices. The power of language is rooted in identity of whose ideas or arguments are being conveyed and heard. On the other hand, language also has the capacity to establish opposition by challenging dominant norms. Janks et al (2014) explains critical literacy as a tool for revealing sociopolitical issues, as reading the words constitutes "reading the *world* in order to change it" (p. 6). Language has gained power because our world is constructed by it. Communication with fellow citizens is done by verbal or written language. Who is in power in these communities is decided by the discourses created. Foucault (1970) emphasized that "discourse is the power which is to be seized" (cited in Janks et al, 2014, p. 6). Thus, discourses can be a privilege to certain groups, shaping their identity and acknowledgement in a society. For example, the *glass ceiling concept,* whereby an invisible, yet strongly concealed ceiling prevents certain people from advancing in the workplace due to racial and social discrimination (Vasquez, Tate & Harste, 2013, p. 9). These are topics that critical literacy aims to uncover by investigating multimodal texts.

2.3 Reading images

Reading images is an act of interpreting a reconstruction (Janks et al, 2014, p. 8). The re-presentation of pictures is not a neutral act, but one that prompts the viewer to transform the way the world is viewed. This reconstruction manipulates signs to shape the text. The semiotic landscape of images and symbols have become a way of self-expression and not merely communication. Using images in a classroom allows for students to explore the visual world without interrogation or comments, as "illustrations are not 'corrected'" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 16). The use of images has expanded greatly in the past decades, in movies, advertisement and curricular books. The role of images has been a secondary form of communication in learning, while the written language "remains the expected and dominant mode" when visual work is expected from children (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 16). The interplay between various modes of expression, sound, images, and written text, is the new visual literacy.

Barthes argued that the meaning of images always was "dependent on verbal text" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 18). The two modes extended each other's meaning, complimenting each other. In later years, Kress & van Leeuwen (2020) argued that images and text are independent modes and are not dependent on each other to create meaning. Images can be interpreted in numerous ways and are therefore thought by some to be too polysemous. Images are built upon characteristics of the social life (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 20). An illustration is structured by political, communicative, and social dimensions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 20). With the new literacy, there is a demand for students to learn how to use the various components of visual grammar.

Images can be defined as "structured messages" based on cultural conventions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 24). Each culture defines their own norms and conventions that dictate the interpretation of codes. As a result, one image can have "many different verbal texts" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 27). Analyzing an image does not follow a set of rules as there is no linear or sequential structure that determines a rightful interpretation. An interpretation is based on the reader's cultural and social background. How symbols are examined is dependent

on cultural norms, which will vary to a great extent. Another component of visual analysis is accepting the visual enigmas and tolerating ambiguity (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 28). The aim has moved from focusing on the texts content to how audiences read the text differently. Meanings are ideological and cultural constructions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 29). Historically, visual signs were effective in propaganda as it reached a heterogenous audience with various levels of linguistic and socially. The role of the semiotic landscape is determined by "interconnections between the changing political, economic, and cultural conditions" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 32). When investigating an image, there are two main aspects of which to be beware. The first principle is that communication through visual semiotics always is coded. Furthermore, these codes are read from cultural perspectives. Secondly, semiotic resources are used in the order in which they are valued in society. The emphasis of visualization will depend on the cultural need for visual components in the language.

The texts itself and the examination of texts introduce a social control. The social discourses are in the text itself and the reason for its publication. In other words, some semiotics are given more power than others, "being subjected to greater institutional" control (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 28). The effect of these institutional discourses on the public is dependent on people's need for their belonging (Janks et al, 2014, p. 33). As a result, people abide by the social and cultural norms. The various cultures construct and depict semiotics for miscellaneous purposes. Semiotics are defined as "the study of signs" (Chandler, 2020, p. 1). Moreover, Chandler (2020) argues that semiotics also includes any symbol that represents something other than itself. Semiotics is the study of how sound, words, images, objects, and gestures, create meaning (Chandler, 2020, p. 2). Peirce and Saussure, the co-founders of semiotics, claimed that signs are related to logic and are affected by the social life.

2.3.1 The metafunction of visual elements
There are various visual elements to consider when analyzing a moving or static image. Each mode of representation serves a purpose in the communication. The notion of 'metafunction' developed by Michael Halliday, proposes three principles to classify a semiotic mode. The first principle is ideational. Moreover, the semiotic modes must portray features of the world

according to the reality by humans. Secondly, the semiotic mode must create a connection between the producer, object presented, and the receiver (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 42). A person looking at the camera is an example of creating a social relation between the elements of communication. The last metafunction of visual communication is the textual aspect. The modes must be able to composite text, whereas the positioning of the modes will determine which textual meaning is highlighted. The main mode of communication serves as *the anchor* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 43). There are numerous semiotic modes included in videos. Furthermore, these semiotic modes must be analyzed in relation to their context.

2.3.12 Sound and verbal language

The category of sound and verbal language builds upon the assumption of language having the power to create a sense of belonging through words and sounds. When words can create a sense of togetherness, they can also produce exclusion. An example is the use of the pronouns "we" and "them", found consecutively in the BLM TikTok videos. The wording explores language as a hierarchy that possesses power, access, and status. An aspect of language to beware of is this naming of individuals or groups, consequently used to maintain power. The prejudice towards these groups may be affected by linguistic choices. The word choices are called lexicalization (Janks et al, 2014, p. 72). Another aspect of language is the principle of language being linked to our identity. How we speak and use language is affected by the communities in which we immerse ourselves. Janks et al (2014) explain that language encodes values and perspectives of the world (p. 53). Social factors can determine which variety of language one utilizes.

2.3.13 Positioning

The positioning of a text is the version offered to the viewer. Which perspective is depicted is determined by the text-makers' beliefs, social positions, geographical position, background, and experiences (Janks et al, 2014, p. 11). The social and ideological position affects the way the text is created and analyzed. Another aspect of positioning is called *space*. Space is where the action and interaction occur. Ferreira & Newfield (2014) argue that the space and human relation is an interdependent relationship, as they affect each other. How the space is arranged

in terms of props, lighting, and color, can uncover parts of their identity and sense of belonging. How a subject move can help determine the character's state of mind.

2.3.14 Printed Text

A text is a constructed entity by the author based on printed or written words (Wilson, 2012, p. 347). A text can also signify a multimodal text being disseminated through numerous modes, but in this thesis when implying to a text, it refers to the written words (Serafini, 2014, p. 13). The text itself does not contain meaning; it is the reader's perception that constitutes the meaning. How the reader engages with the text and attributes meaning to it is determined by the textuality. Wilson (2012) argues that the textuality of the text positions the reader according to their own interest and backgrounds. Textuality describes the "co-presence" of reading, which positions and guides the reader in the textual terrain of elongated words and peripheral meanings (Wilson, 2012, p. 347). Furthermore, the term textuality describes the social conditions which surround the creation and adaptation of the text. Janks et al (2014) argues that "words have meaning in contexts" (p. 23). The meaning will depend on the social purpose of the text and "the micro-politics of everyday life" (Janks et al, 2014, p. 31). The text itself is referring to the physical form of its representation but is given meaning through the author's voice. The author's voice is revealed through the linguistic features chosen to present the written information. Another aspect to explore is how texts are politically based. A biased text relates to whose perspective is presented and whose is excluded. This ranking in linguistic positions will create inequality. The inequality can indicate who has better access to education, which may be identified through the linguistic choices in the TikTok videos. The text is not always the anchor in a multimodal text but is still an important feature in the multimodal product.

2.3.15 Type of shot

The way the camera captures the moments is called the shot. The shots are chosen accordingly to emphasize certain features of the object or landscape in focus. There are a range of shots: close-up, extreme close-up, medium shot, long shot, or extreme long shot (Ferreira & Newfield, 2014, p. 199). An extreme long shot reveals many details surrounding the settlement,

showcasing the image. The close-ups accentuate a certain essential feature. Moreover, close-ups of facial expressions highlight the mood of the subject. The angle from which the object is deliberately shot affect how the viewer is positioned and matches the image-maker's intentions. If the subject of interest is above the viewer's eyeline, the viewer is encouraged to look up to the subject, portraying the person as of great importance.

2.3.16 Physical appearance and movement

A visual text not only represents the spoken word, but the visual modes of gestures, facial expression, and posture must be interpreted (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 41). The *demand gaze* is an essential part of visual language, as it demands a connection with the viewer. Where the subject is looking determines the intended role of the viewer. The demand gaze activates the viewer, as it demands participation. This action can be metaphorically linked to breaking the fourth wall, as the demand gaze delegates responsibility to the audience. The fourth wall is an imaginary boundary between the actors and audience, where the actors are creating an illusion on stage whilst the spectators observe (Stichter, 2016, p. 5). When the actors break the fourth wall, they extend an invitation to the audience to participate through direct eye-contact or addressing them through conversation. If there is no eye contact between the viewer and the subject, the subject becomes "an object of examination" (Ferreira & Newfield, 2014, p. 100). A study conducted by Palanica & Itier (2014) showed the effectiveness of demand gaze. The researchers investigated whether eye direction had a role to play in how long the participants watched the videos. The subjects were shown videos of agents that either had a demand gaze or averted gaze. As a result, they found a significant and positive correlation between a demand gaze of the agents and how long the subject watched the illustration. The subjects watched the agents for a longer time if they had a demand gaze. The spectators are offered to observe and interpret the subject. The body language of the subject is easier for the viewer to interpret as it demonstrates more clearly the character´s emotions. For instance, arms crossed signifies resistance and a person being closed-off to other stimuli. Movement is depicted as movement across space and time. The topic of BLM does not only demonstrate discrimination through verbal and physical boundaries but also highlights the issue of access to

space through racial, political, and social factors. Ferreira & Newfield (2014) argue that "who we are affects our mobility" (p. 111). Another visual mode that enhances the viewer's understanding of the subject are the costumes. Clothing reflects the subject´s economic situation, geographical position, and personality. Lastly, the colors used have great significance to convey the mood and atmosphere.

2.3.2 Encoding and Decoding texts

Janks et al (2014) solely believe that being a part of humanity includes the responsibility of actively viewing the world as it is and taking social action to change any disparities. The texts being presented to the public showcase social, cultural, and political norms. Decoding a text, uncovering these norms and biases is called comprehension (Janks et al, 2014, p. 26). The meaning of a text is dependent on its relation to other texts, called intertextuality (Janks et al, 2014, p. 24). The meaning will emerge through its connection to other historical or social texts. Stuart Hall attempts to describe the cycle of how messages are communicated between the participants. The theory of communication includes the steps of production, circulation, use and reproduction (During, 2007, p. 477). Hall claims each step is an independent actor, where each step is interpreted differently. The process of interaction between the text-participant and the text is a co-dependent relationship. The two mechanisms bring meaning to each other (Janks et al, 2014, p. 26). There are several visual components applied to promote the message of an image and can be used by the viewer to explore potential meanings. The visual grammar of images depends on various conventions that are culturally specific (Serafini, 2013, p. 55). Hence, analyzing images is culturally biased and "offer meaning potentials only when associated with a specific sociocultural context" (Serafini, 2013, p. 55). We talk about images as having *meaning potentials;* however, these potentials are only created when the viewer engages with the image.

To engage an audience with an image is to underline its meaning. Kulick (2020) argue meaning "is more often felt than thought" (p. 3). Images do not need to be moving to create meaning, "still images do move, in the emotional sense, and more so due to their stillness" (Serafini,

2013, p. 55). It emphasizes the potential for images to not only offer information or entertainment but to potentially affect the viewer in an emotional sense. The key component of a theatrical event is to engage the emotions of the audience. The role of the spectators vacillates between being receptive and interactive and is the core element of any theatrical affair (Orr, 2006, p. 369). Stichter (2016) supports this claim by stating that theatrical performance is "defined by this quality of presence" (p. 2). The indispensable participation by the audience is based on the response to the theatrical embodiment, a representation of a character by the actor (Zamir, 2010, p. 240). Theatrical embodiment creates a relation, as it upholds a continuous dialogue between the spectacle and spectator. Boal (2008) claims the "spectator delegates no power…he himself assumes the protagonist role" (p. 98). This act of viewing ourselves in the eyes of the protagonist is the very foundation of theatre and ego identification. Ego identification is defined as allowing the message of the theatrical performance impact its audience. The playwrights aim is to motivate the spectators to change their behavior or mindset by empathizing with the characters, by experiencing vicariously through the actors (Stichter, 2016, p. 3).

An aspect introduced by Bishop (1990) demonstrates how the emotional engagement can be obtained. The 'sliding door' concept explores how the interconnectedness between people in real life is accomplished through inviting viewers to stand with the actors. Theatre is not only a play that lasts for two hours or so but attempts to invoke emotion and engagement inside the spectator. This feeling or recollection of events in the performance will stick in our memory. The *remanence* becomes "the partial persistence of a phenomenon once its cause has disappeared" (Andre, 2012, cited in Kulick, 2020, p. 198). The recollection of memories the viewer retains after the theatre has concluded is the remanence. How the artists employ theatrical elements to obtain the remanence effect after producing the TikTok videos is the pursuit in this thesis.

2.4 Theatrical elements of expression

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts..."
– Shakespeare, <u>As you like it,</u> Act 2, Scene 7

Shakespeare, one of the founding fathers of Western theatre, explicitly suggests that the world is a stage. He argues how the theatre merely reflects how the ordinary world plays out its events. Thus, I will analyze TikTok videos with reference to theatrical elements, viewing them set up as a play being performed. A play can be performed in any arena, with the intention of delivering a message and somehow commenting on human existence. Therefore, in my opinion, a parallel can be created to TikTok videos, as this platform also aims at conveying a message about human behavior. The theatrical elements of expression have their own exceptional grammar and rules, and I will analyze the theatrical elements using Kulick's (2020) interpretation. When the elements are combined in various arrangements, meaning will emerge. In the way that Kulick (2020) discusses the theatrical element of truth, he establishes it as a fundamental principle of theatre (p. 19). The cornerstone of a theatrical production is in the search for *truth*, either societal or individual truth. To obtain the truth, the characters ask *questions*. To arrive at these questions, there needs to be *moments* where something *changes* for the characters to create an awareness. This interrelation between the theatrical elements shows their co-dependency, as one element links to another in the ultimate search of the *truth*. The pursuit of truth is a basic human instinct, as we are in a constant search of controlling and understanding our environment.

Although meaning is more consolidated through a sequence of elements, they will be analyzed separately for their function and effect. Their meaning can link to how one perceives an artwork, in this case a TikTok video. The theatrical elements serve as an umbrella term in which all the visual and sound elements contribute to the theatrical elements' extent of engagement. This thesis will apply the theatrical components related to the Western theatre.

2.4.1 Questions

Theatre is built upon questions at its foundation, as it drives the play in search of answers about human existence and behavior (Kulick, 2020, p. 8). The most famous question derives from Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* where the protagonist asks, "To be, or not to be, that is the question?". The questions will guide the theatrical events in search of truth and answers. Theatre aims for the audience to recognize their own "behaviors as they are reflected back to us by actors" (Kulick, 2020, p. 2). Kulick (2020) claims theatre as a plural affair, where the audience is observing, but also is actively engaged in the experience (p. 5). This can be linked to the BLM videos, in which the actors are searching for meaning and solutions to racial injustice. The questions are intended to find the causes and motives behind conflicts, both in the physical and emotional sense. The questions will attempt to answer whom, where, what and why a conflict arises (Kulick, 2020, p. 10). This broad use of adverbs allows the audience to examine a conflict through various modalities; sociological, spiritual, political, psychological, and philosophical (Kulick, 2020, p. 10). These questions guide us to decipher the society around us. Often, the actors are presented with two choices or paths. This diversion of alternatives originated in Greek tragedy, in which the audience follows the interim between the actors' decisions. It is in the interim of decisions and possible answers that the truth reveals itself.

2.4.2 Truth

Throughout our lives we look for the truth: truth in relationships, in our work and within ourselves. Truth in theatre is built upon relating "the unknown to our known" (Kulick, 2020, p. 19). To achieve this, the component of *mimesis* is adopted, mirroring the audience's reality. The concept of discovering life's truths through theatre originated in Greek drama, called the Greek moment. These moments are guided toward shared truths through *paraiphasis*, the "persuasion born of deep familiarity" (Kulick, 2020, p. 18). Theatre attempts to bind common human experiences and create connections that will lead to emotional involvement in the play. This emotional investment resides in what the Russian writer Tolstoy calls "the tiny bit" (Kulick, 2020, p. 19). These are powerful infinitesimal details that occur in the moments that change when a character gets an epiphany or an alteration in sound pattern. These can modify the audience's perception of the play´s atmosphere. Another aspect of truth is *the gap*. The gap

resembles the raw truth, not yet occluded by language. It is not the truth spoken by language, but the truth that we catch a glimpse of through what is not being made evident to us. In TikTok videos, what is missing or left out? What is not being said? A truth can also reside in what is not being said, just as well as it can be found in what is being said. The art of theatre can help retrieve our lost memories and experiences by "restoring a missing integer of reality", which enables us to view life with more perspective than before we entered the theatre (Kulick, 2020, p. 29). This aspect relates to critical literacy and being able to identify and interrogate from multiple viewpoints.

2.4.3 Moments

A moment is a unit of time where "an intention is elicited by the now" (Kulick, 2020, p. 31). The intention defines and gives direction to the small units of *nows*. The aggregate of all the moments leads to the unfolding, a resolution. Each moment has its own intention and energy. The revelation of the sequence of moments presents the discovery of the *moment-in-between*, which is when the truth unfolds. When encountering a dire situation, humans believe they will be capable to rise to the occasion. However, Kulick (2020) claims this to be false (p. 15). How do humans react in life-changing moments? Between the moments of an event that has transpired and moments forthcoming, that is when the shift is recognizable for the audience and allows for reflection. The subsequent meaning of each moment is interpreted by the audience through their individual experiences. Significant moments demarcate the turning points and have a propensity to highlight certain hidden features. Making these features visible is called the *core moments* and is thematically linked (Kulick, 2020, p. 173). Kulick (2020) alleges these events move from giving the impression of something, to displaying their clear presence (p. 173). The core moments can reveal a buried history or expose a character in its full glory. Core moments are ultimately events of revelation. The core moments can be identified by three characteristics. The first sign is how it changes the direction of a scene. Secondly, they can recognize the demarcation of before and after events. Lastly, the recovery from a scene after an event is seemingly impossible can be signified by core moments. An essential aspect to

remember is how cores are interpretational, which becomes an individual viewer analysis (Kulick, 2020, p. 175).

2.4.4 Change

In theatre and in life, change is the ultimate catalyst for character development. Kulick (2020) argues humans "are creatures of change" (p. 46). Situations and people alter because of various unforeseen circumstances. These changes are often hidden in "their simplicity and familiarity" with daily life (Kulick, 2020, p. 46). Theatre provides us the opportunity to show the audience up close how these changes occur, creating room for reflection upon their own lives. There is the change in behavior, but also in sound. Micro-shifts in sound can affect "different emotive locations within us" (Kulick, 2020, p. 49). The change that can disturb the emotive locations in us is called the peripetia, being a "fundamental turn" in the unfolding of events (Kulick, 2020, p. 49). The delineation of moments that bisect reality is the foundation of a theatrical perspective. Peripetias gives the opportunity to analyze moments from a theatrical viewpoint. One aspect of change is the setting of words, feelings, and actions up against one another, called antithesis (Kulick, 2020, p. 51). This contrast emphasizes the development of moments. The changes of moments may result in a character learning an essential lesson about him/herself, acknowledging the "multitude of oppositions within us" (Kulick, 2020, p. 61). The change is evident in the spatial, temporal, aural, ocular, tonal, sensorial, and psychological changes.

2.5 Reader/Viewer position

When we produce or interpret a text, the choices will not always be deliberate or conscious. However, the decision will also never be neutral. There are several factors that play into our unconscious and conscious mind, such as our sociocultural background, geographical position, and educational background. A highly academic text will not be perceived in the same manner by two people of distinct educational qualifications. It also depends on the various societies in which people are raised. In collectivist societies, their perspective is serving the community rather than the individual. It derives from the African philosophy of 'Ubuntu', meaning "a

person is a person through other people" (Janks et al, 2014, p. 3). On the other hand, the discourse of individuality influences the liberal societies. Furthermore, the society serving individuals is more prominent than the community in liberal cultures. In addition to the discourses of social habits, the conventions of society also guide our behavior. These conventions are social norms that are rules created within communities to navigate how, where and when we speak (Janks et al, 2014, p. 3). Social norms determine power relations which are to a great extent related to language.

The social and cultural norms are based on cultural imaginaries. Cultural imaginaries are defined as how an individual uses the former acquired cultural knowledge in an encounter with a multimodal text. Brown & Habegger-Conti (2022) explain this concept as defining a person or group before reading the image as it presents itself (p. 51). They also argue that stereotypes are often visually recognized as the reader/viewer tend to look for "markers of difference", categorizing people into groups (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2022, p. 52). This correlates with Sherwin's (2008) claim about how people depict images as a blunt reflection of reality, which strengthens their existing cultural beliefs about stereotypical representations (cited in Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2022, p. 53). As a result, reading /watching the TikTok videos becomes "an intercultural encounter" in which the potential exists to bring awareness to how stereotypes are conveyed, and how viewers are positioned (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2022, p. 52). This is an important aspect in this thesis that will pinpoint and address the research question concerning how do the theatrical elements present the themes of identity and power.

The truth presented by the media offers a version of the truth adhered to by most people. Who controls the media outlet influences the social conventions of language behavior and values. The rules influencing our society are constructed by fellow citizens. Another aspect to cognizant of is to whom the media directs itself. People have various educational backgrounds which influences their level of language proficiency and understanding. People do not have equal language liberties. In other words, not all citizens have the language proficiency to understand the information being conveyed. Research shows that is the reason Trump was/is so appealing

to many Americans, is that he spoke/speaks in a simple language that everyone could /can understand. Communicating in an understandable language is about making the other party feel seen and heard. This example demonstrates the importance of language, the power of the media and how to to uncover the text-makers indication of the intended audience.

Janks et al (2014) enlightens there are four roles of the viewer (p. 26). The first role is the text decoder, in which the viewer reads an image by investigating the various modes of communication and how they are combined to create meaning (Janks et al, 2014, p. 26). Secondly, the audience becomes a text participant. In other words, the participant both brings meaning to the text through their previous knowledge, and extracts meaning, analyzing what the image means. Next, the viewer becomes an image user. We read text and image with a purpose, either for informational resources or as entertainment. This role underlines the important aspect of recognizing that each genre shapes the form, language, and content for its purpose. The last role of the viewer is the text analyst. In this role, the audience examines the producer's choices and explores the social effects of these choices. The social effects look at the power relations - what perspective is favored and whose voice is absent (Janks et al, 2014, p. 27).

Power and bias are portrayed in numerous ways in the texts. The bias presented in the texts are connected to cultural ideology, where how a text is shaped is a direct result of the objective. Uncovering the power and bias is related to how I classified the TikTok videos and is shown in Section 3. The first technique for recognizing power is *legitimate*, in which a topic is presented in a logical manner with the intention of informing the audience, as seen in the news reports on TikTok. Secondly, operating by only disclosing parts of the truth is called *concealing,* or disguising power. Next, *unifying* a group of people through new ideas or symbols of unity is another technique for recognizing power. As a result, a collectivist mindset is created. This is shown through the political art and live events of protests that use BLM posters and the fist in the air as a marker. This operation leads to another technique, *fragment*, which focuses on dividing people. In this way, power is used to emphasize the difference between groups, othering (Janks et al, 2014, p. 29). This is shown in a political art video in which the intention is

to show the treatment of black victims versus white police officers. Studies show that the most effective way to create a group is to find a common enemy. Lastly, turning an action into states of affairs, called *thingify*. This technique uses passive nouns with no actors. As a result, there becomes no accountability for their actions. It does not become clear who has implemented the decision presented.

2.6 Previous research

The research for this study draws upon the former research on the topic of TikTok, which guided the direction of this investigation. Former research explores the TikTok platform as an emerging medium to communicate and advocate for various topics. One study conducted about the use and content analysis of TikTok in the UK to communicate information about Covid-19, showed numerous interesting findings. The results showed that including hashtags and subtitles were related to a higher number of views. Also, there was a positive correlation between videos concerning emotions during Covid-19 and receiving higher viewer engagement (Li, Guan, Hammond & Berrey, 2021, p.1). As a result of these findings, I decided to use the hashtags to search for appropriate videos that also contained subtitles.

A study conducted by Hickey (2022) explored TikTok and the Black Lives Matter Movement with the aim of determining the content posted, intention of the content creators and whether it would be an effective method in community building. The study concluded it would be an effective platform in community building and discussions surrounding the topic.

There is also research conducted in Norwegian classrooms that focuses on multimodal texts and reading comprehension. A case study by Beenfeldt (2016) organized in upper secondary classrooms investigated how reading multimodal texts can improve overall literacy competence. The findings demonstrated that reading multimodal texts can give a broad spectrum of opportunities to enhance English language proficiency and creativity.

These studies focus on TikTok as an accessible and effective platform of communication that conveys information and engages the community. My research fills a gap in the research by

attempting to answer *how* the videos engage and through *what* specific features. In addition, I extend my research to focus on the theatrical elements, which has the sole focus of engaging an audience. This research can be helpful for educational purposes which is to uncover bias and power relations in multimodal texts, and the visual and linguistic tools utilized.

3. Methodology

In the following section, the methods employed in this study will be made prominent. There are several reasons for the choice of using mixed methods research to answer the research questions in this thesis. The quantitative method is used to answer research questions (1) and (2), while the qualitative method elaborates on questions (3) and (4).

1) What theatrical elements of expression are utilized in TikTok-videos to engage an audience?
2) What characteristics describe the most viewed BLM videos on TikTok?
3) How do the theatrical elements of expression utilized present the themes of identity and power?
4) What insight does a critical literacy approach bring to the BLM movement on Tik Tok?

Qualitative research explores an "aspect of reality that cannot be quantified" (Queiròs, Faira & Almeida, 2017, p. 370). Maxwell (2013) argues this method is searching for truth in a "universe of meaning" and elaborates on values and attitudes. In other words, these interpretations cannot be reduced to functional variables. The qualitative method can help answer the research question of how the theatrical elements are being used in the TikTok videos, and their possible effect. On the other hand, the quantitative method answers the research question of which elements are present in the videos. Furthermore, the quantitative method handles a larger sample of data, which is more representative and objective. This method attempts to explore the dynamics of social relations by finding the components used.

The quantitative and qualitative methods have various strengths and weaknesses. One strength of the qualitative method is that the researcher has the role of both the object and subject (Queiròs et al, 2017, p. 370). The aim is to create in-depth analysis and investigate the dimensions being affected by the visual elements. The object and idea are racial injustice being discussed in TikTok videos, whilst the subject concerns how the information is being presented. The two methods complement each other and provide answers to the research questions chosen. The methods of analysis attempt to answer the research questions that covers the scale of describing how theatrical elements are effective in activating empathic responses from viewers, the role of critical literacy in a classroom, the themes of identity and power, and the most common visual and audible characteristics in TikTok videos. The analytical methods are chosen according to the focal point of the study, which is to analyze the visual and sound elements used in TikTok videos to engage the audience, while delivering various information about the Black Lives Matter movement.

3.1 Corpora

The corpora of TikTok videos fulfilled several criteria of selection. The criteria were chosen to make the data sample relevant, regarding when it was published, the content, and that included visual and sound elements. To find similar videos, I used hashtags, making them a roadmap in the search of the most viewed videos and conveyed information about BLM in an effective manner. The video must have met the following criteria:

- Published in years 2020-2023
- Embodied or portrayed information about BLM, either emotional or factual
- Contained visual and sound elements
- Used the hashtags of #BLM or #Blacklivesmatter.

I chose 35 videos for the quantitative analysis and five of the 35 for my qualitative investigation. These videos portray BLM through various lenses and utilize different features to convey its message to the viewer. The various lenses are news reports, live events, poetry, informational videos, and political art. This way of categorizing the videos was inspired by previous research

by Li et al (2021) as they classified videos according to content. Classifying videos according to the content will help determine the specific modes used in those genres, and whether that is of significance. I chose a variation of all these categories in the data sample, demonstrating a range of TikTok qualities and information. There were numerous videos that fit the criteria, but I wanted a compilation of videos that also emotionally engaged me because an aim of this thesis is to depict videos that have the potential to affect the viewer's emotions. The number of videos selected for the quantitative analysis is to ensure a broad spectrum of videos and can help distinguish whether there is a significant difference between the frequency of certain visual elements and the message being conveyed.

3.2 Quantitative method

The categories chosen for the quantitative analysis are provided below. The classification of the videos derives from Janks et al (2014) and Kulick (2020). Janks et al (2014) provide the categories of shots, demand gaze, props, word choice and color contrast as elements of multimodal texts. Janks et al (2014) mentions color, but I wanted to narrow it down to color creating contrast, scrutinizing the function of color. Kulick (2020) adds to the categories, mentioning actions and change in voice. He did not specifically mention the change *in voice*, but I drew from his understanding of change that change in voice is a fundamental element of theatrical expressions. The speaker's engagement and mood can be tracked through the pace in their voices.

Elements	Props	Color contrast	Demand gaze	Sound effect	Close-up shots	Change in voice	Action	Word choice

Table 1.0 Genres for the quantitative analysis.

The categories chosen for the quantitative analysis are essential components in the construction of a theatrical piece. I chose these elements because their presence in a play causes distinct and noticeable dynamic altercations in characters, mood, atmosphere, and morale in a play. Hence, these changes may influence the audience. Kulick (2020) argues that

changes create room for reflection and target emotive locations within us (p. 49). As a result, these visual and audial elements will help answer the research questions of which elements of expression are used to convey the topic of BLM. The props are the property or object used by the character. In the BLM videos, a prop can be poles to signify imprisonment. Secondly, I wanted to explore not only the colors, but rather the color contrast. A contrast emphasizes difference, but also the potential of both colors. Colors often symbolize mood and will be explored further in the qualitative analysis. The demand gaze breaks the fourth wall between the audience and the actor, where the actor invites the observer to take part in the event unfolding on the stage set. As a result, it intensifies the emotional response and evokes the human connection and responsibility to stand up to racial inequality. The fourth element included in the quantitative analysis is sound. The sound includes music, pitch, or sounds in the background. An example would be loud yelling in the background at a BLM demonstration. Furthermore, close-up shots of either facial expression or an object will make the viewer aware of essential details, giving an object intense focus and attention. Another element is the change in voice which constitutes volume, dialect, or pace. If a person at a demonstration for BLM speaks loudly and fast, it showcases the characters' desperation for political and cultural change. Next, action is about the character's body language and movement. An example of this is a person taking a knee and a fist in the air to symbolize fighting and taking a stand for freedom. Lastly, the word choice is both the printed and verbal text, including lyrics.

3.3 Methodology

In this subsection, the methodology will be presented. The methods selected are chosen to answer the research questions most effectively.

3.3.1 Multimodal discourse analysis

To complete the qualitative examination of the four TikTok videos the multimodal discourse analysis method will be applied. Discourse analysis considers how the "individuals impress reality with meaning" as they are intertwined with daily life (Durmaz & Yoğun, 2022, p. 26). There are numerous visual and audial features that will be analyzed for their function and

contribution to the multimodal representation. The visual elements being examined are theatrical elements, auditory, movement, and visual components. Multimodal discourse analysis investigates the modes of language, image, and sound, in which meaning is "inferred from semiotics" (Luca, 2020, p. 75). This method has progressed to theatre interpretation in which value is found in "analyzing costumes as a source of information" revealing age, status, and sociocultural background (Luca, 2020, p. 74). The meaning that emerges from all the modes helps illustrate the overall message of the TikTok video. The first step is identifying what visual, auditory, and theatrical elements are present. The second step is categorizing them accordingly by the components of props, costumes, colors, and verbal text etc. Next, the findings will be analyzed for their function. For example, props are explored for their relation to symbolism, colors used to underline the mood, and costumes are evaluated to reveal potential power in relation to uniforms and displaying sociocultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the verbal text is significant as it relates to who is speaking and what they are conveying.

Another method utilized in the attempts to enhance our understanding of how these visual modes communicate meaning together is Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA) (Newfield, 2011, p. 82). VDA concerns the conventions and structures within visual texts and seeks to investigate the "social identities…[that] play out in their production" (Albers, 2007, p. 81). This method comments on the numerous modes found in the multimodal text. Kress (2010) argues there are different modal affordances in an intermedial compositions. Furthermore, these modes have different limitations and particularities in terms of affordances which offers a variety in function in communication (Santos Costa & Xavier, 2016, p. 203). In other words, the modes bounce off each other and are reliant on the quality each element possesses to portray an adequate image. This constitutes "art as a language system" (Albers, 2007, p. 81).

3.3.2 Reliability and Validity

To what extent the research conducted is accurately conducted depends on the variables of reliability and validity. Reliability refers to "the degree of consistency in measurement and to the lack of error" (Gidron, 2013, p. 1643), while validity refers to the degree in which the method measures the aim it was set to measure.

There are various limitations when using a qualitative and quantitative method of analysis. In qualitative analysis, the interpretation is an individual process and will therefore vary depending on who analyzes the corpora. However, my interpretation will be consistent throughout the analysis development, as I investigate the same elements in all videos. Furthermore, this inductive coding method organizes the data according to a thematic categorization, ensuring the reliability and validity. Secondly, the videos mainly concern the US, as the videos were mostly filmed and produced in the US by unknown producers. As a result, one must be careful to generalize these results to other areas of the world. The TikTok videos are created and published by individual agents who have the intention of provoking through artistic choices. On the other hand, one must beware that the intention of the producer is not always stated in the video. Lastly, some of the TikTok videos convey personal experiences, which are not officially confirmed to be true. However, an important part of humanity and freedom of speech is recognizing the need to share our stories, even though bias will be present.

There are also implications to the corpora and method of analysis chosen. I have chosen to analyze using a mixed method to ensure reliable findings. Furthermore, there is a broad spectrum of data, which will give a clear indication of what visual elements are the most common and effective. Also, the videos picked are from the last three years, demonstrating the current state of BLM and the technological tools used to depict the movement.

3.3.3 Ethical considerations
When conducting this research there is an ethical principle to consider, the ethics of representation. There are two main ethical considerations. The first ethical consideration concerns the TikTok platform. TikTok has received criticism for lacking security and letting inappropriate videos of adult content and violence surface. Moreover, the algorithms used grasp the attention of the viewer by providing similar content to previously searched content. In this way, watching TikTok videos becomes a time-consuming activity, with limited ways to restrict and monitor the content. Also, TikTok becomes a replacement for books, watching the

news and learning new skills, as TikTok provides all those services in one place in a more accessible way. The main issue raised demonstrates that no one can monitor the reliability of the content being published (Wu, 2022).

The second ethical consideration builds on the assumption that "groups are dispersed by the same socio-historical forces which generated them" (McDonnell, 2005, p. 128). In other words, racial representations can be maintained and created on web domains. It is therefore interesting to explore how the producers of the BLM videos portray themselves, as they advocate for justice through their own narrative. The ethical principle is based on recognizing that the producers decide how they portray themselves. Since most of the artists and producers are black, the reliability on the information they provide comes from trusting their experiences. The objective of ethics of representation is "interpreting other people's interpretations" (McDonnell, 2005, p. 135). In other words, I will interpret the producers of the TikTok videos´ interpretation of BLM. The ethical principle is to explore the videos in a respectful manner as I, a white woman, am interpreting a racial issue portrayed by black people. This is also supported by Kirsch and Mortensen (1996) who claim ethics of representation include how I "have represented others in the ethnographic narratives they have written" (p. 22).

4. Findings and discussion

In this section, the processed data and findings will be presented. To answer the research questions, the analysis will be presented with reference to the theoretical background introduced in Chapter 2. The findings are displayed in tables and figures for an explicit overview and a fair foundation for comparison between the TikTok videos. The first section will exhibit the distribution of the findings, where, when and by whom the video was published. Secondly, a display of the features of analysis will be presented in tables demonstrating the quantitative analysis. Lastly, the qualitative analysis will consist of an in-depth investigation of five videos, attempting to answer the research questions.

1) What theatrical elements of expression are utilized in TikTok-videos to engage an audience?

2) What characteristics describe the most-viewed BLM videos on TikTok?

3) How do the theatrical elements of expression utilized present the themes of identity and power?

4) What insight does a critical literacy approach bring to the BLM movement on Tik Tok?

4.1 Distribution of findings

The main aim of this subsection is to present the videos chosen and their background information; that is, where, viewer numbers, category of what type of video, when and by whom each was produced. The categories are as follows: political art, news report, poetry, informative, or a live event. The videos are categorized according to their main means of communication, and how this affects their function. Political art contains painting, drawings, or aesthetic ways of portraying BLM. This category describes making a political statement through artwork, such as painting a fist in the air with the letters BLM. The news report category includes videos that are shared from live coverage on television. On the other hand, the informative category is done by individuals on TikTok, not through a professional broadcasting platform. The classification of the poetry category constitutes the delivery of the words, including rhythm and rhyme. Lastly, the live events category includes the TikTok videos showing live footage from demonstrations, filmed by civilians and not government officials. All the videos have similar aims, which is to highlight emotional or informational responses to racial injustice. The videos depicted were commonly produced in the US, with a few exceptions posted in the UK.

Classification of video	Political art	Live event	News report	Poetry	Informative
Total number of videos (35)	14	11	5	4	1

Table 2.0 Classification of the videos.

Year of release date	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total number of videos (35)	25	3	5	2

Table 3. Year the videos appeared on TikTok.
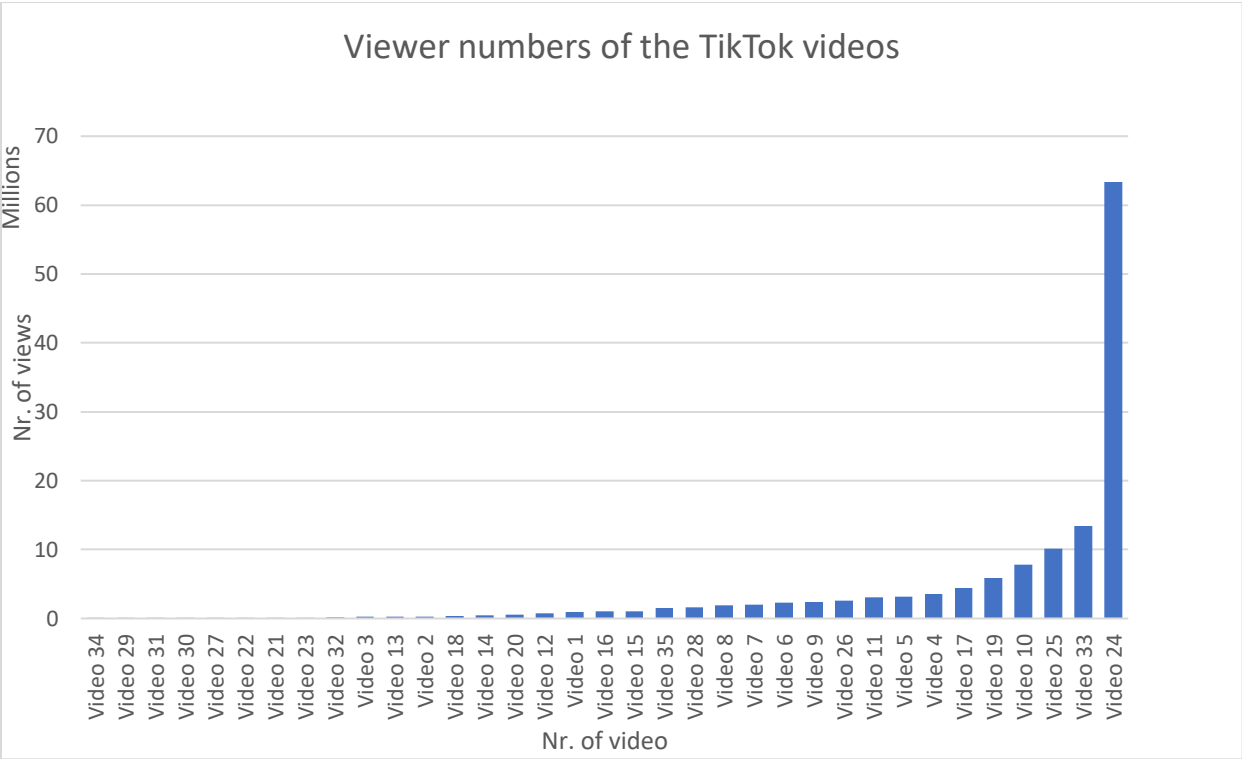
Chart 1.0 Number of viewers per TikTok video

4.2 Quantitative findings

Elements	Frequency
Props	27
Color contrast	26
Demand gaze	17
Sound effect	30
Close-up shots	20

Change in speech pattern	22
Action	34
Word choice	35

Table 4. Frequency of specific features

Table 3 displays the frequency of selected features that are most common in the 35 videos analyzed. As a result, the most common element is word choice, both verbal and written text. The element of word choice was included somehow in every video, demonstrating its importance when conveying information through TikTok videos. The second most frequent component is action. Action portrays some type of body language. In most videos, there is either background noise expressing the rage and chaos of the BLM movement, or music highlighting the stream of thought.

4.3 Qualitative findings

In this subsection, the qualitative analysis of the videos depicted will be presented. The five videos selected represent each of the five categories, political art, informative, live event, poetry, and news report. I am using a multimodal analysis to examine the overall theatrical vision through the visual elements and audial elements. There are QR codes provided for each of the five videos being analysed qualitatively. When the reader of this thesis places a camera over the QR code, he/she will be redirected to a website showing the video. The reader does not need a TikTok account for the video to play.

4.3.1 Video 1 by @Jordi.Koalitic

The TikTok made by Jordi.Koalitic viewed by 63.4 million people, offers a variety of visual and audial elements that enhances our understanding of BLM. The video was found using the hashtags (#BlackLivesMatter, #Justice, and #endracism), and is categorized as political art. It shows the viewer the various elements utilized to produce the two powerful images shown below.

Figure 1. Image produced by Jordi.Koalitic from his TikTok video.
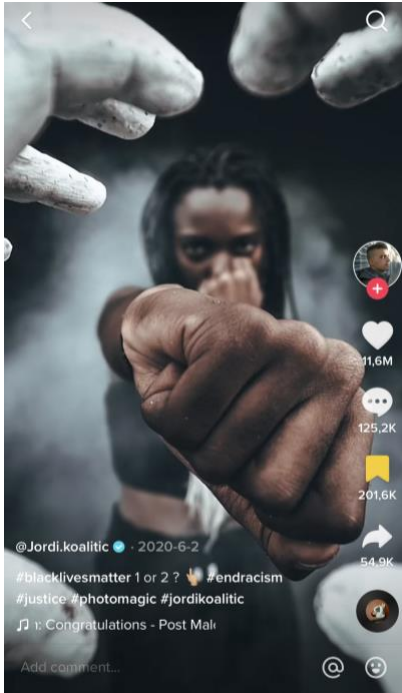
Figure 2. The second shot produced by Jordi.Koalitic in his TikTok video.

4.3.11 Visual elements

The visual elements used in this video are text, colors, body language, facial expression, props, positioning, costumes, and lighting.

The only printed text provided is the hashtags #blacklivesmatter, #justice, #endracism and #photomagic. Although the text is simplified to hashtags, they encompass the actions in the video.

Secondly, the component of colors is another element present in the video. The two final images use the same color palette. In the first image, the man is wearing a black shirt while holding on to white poles. In the second image created, the woman is wearing a black sports bra and black shorts, while white hands are attempting to grab her. The contrast is portraying the objects with the color white as the antagonist, while the black people are the protagonists being victimized and resisting the oppression. Historically, the darker colors have been

associated with fear and sadness. Contrastingly, this video changes society's perception of dynamic of colors, giving the white color the role of the tyrant.

The body language is the anchorage in this video, as it is the element communicating the most meaning. The man is holding white poles, not leaning into them but he positioned his hands illustrating the action of pulling them apart. Contrastingly, the woman's body language is more active. She is punching towards the camera with one hand and protecting herself with the other. The last action is the anonymous white hands attempting to grab her. These actions are a combination of passive and active motions. Even though the man is displayed as more passive, there are signs of resistance by the positioning of his hands.

The facial expressions are another fundamental element. The manly protagonist has a relaxed, yet firm, facial expression. He stares directly into the camera, a demand gaze. A demand gaze is effective when engaging the audience, as it demands the viewer to participate in the events unfolding in the video. Likewise, the woman also has a demand gaze with a more serious facial expression. This is shown by her tilting her head slightly, making the eye contact more intense.

The props are also a distinct element in this video, as they create the symbolism in the images. The poles and white hands make up the antagonistic role needed to portray black oppression and struggle. Poles symbolize restraining something or someone. In this case, the poles are confining basic human rights and signalizing the imprisonment of innocent black people throughout history. The white hands symbolize the wrongful intention of attacking black people.

The positioning of characters, props and scenery is another element. The video is set in a parking lot in a crowded urban area. The sunny weather stands in contrast to the serious issue the producers are portraying. The video is shot from a side angle showing the set-up of the characters, props, and lighting, and straight forward, but in a horizontal line maintaining the ground-level.

The costumes are minimalistic in color and area of coverage. The colors of the clothing are dark and anonymous. The effect of this clothing choice is the intention of taking the focus away from the costumes of the characters and moving the focal point to their actions. Consequently, the body is telling the story and not the words or clothing.

Lastly, the lighting also plays a role in constructing the images. The producer uses a smoke machine to fill the background with smoke. The effect of smoke is to create a suspenseful atmosphere, but also an ambiguous background. Furthermore, the tool could either hide or cover something in the background.

4.3.12 Audial effects

There is no speaking, but only music is used to convey the story. The music is a mash-up of *This is America* by Childish Gambio and *Congratulations* by Post Malone. The combination of these two songs becomes an ironic duo. *This is America* has become a trademark of the BLM movement as it reflects upon the racial injustice in the US.

> *"Come to my area. I got this strap.*
> *Why do they always say congratulations.*
> *This is America. Don't catch you slippin now"*

The first few lines show us a mash-up of the two songs and already indicate several points. The first line highlights the need for having a strap (slang word for a gun) in their area of living. It demonstrates the danger and need for protection. Next, the artist asks why people say congratulations. This ironic line contradicts the American dream and freedom people can obtain in the US. The American dream has long been the US's face outwards, depicting the US as a land of endless opportunity if you work. The treatment of immigrants and minorities is another issue, which is astonishing as the US is a country built by immigrants. The line *This is America* is undressing the representation of the US as a country of opportunity for all, but rather highlights the oppression of minorities and black people who are denied the same treatment and possibilities as white citizens. Moreover, the line is repeated numerous times in the song, emphasizing its significance. The last line is a warning not to slip up when people are

watching, especially since the racist mindset permeates huge parts of the US society and institutions.

4.3.13 Theatrical elements

The theatrical element of change is demonstrated through body language. The shots move from active movement to still. When the still image is shown, it offers the viewer time to reflect and observe and thereby reveals the truth. The truth exposes the reality about America through art. The truth is the tough battle for equality, and both the literal and figurative imprisonment on false premises based on skin color. The questions raised are based on the song by Post Malone, *Celebration*, asking whether America is a country worth celebrating when a large quantity of their citizens experience racial injustice. The sequence of quick and slow moments has different focal points and perspectives. One of the moments depicts victimization, while the other becomes a demonstration and illustration of strength. The variation in pace between moments allows the audience to absorb the various elements at play and gives time for reflection.

4.3.2 Video 2 - by bettyk.702

This TikTok video was published in 2020 by Betty Kalunga in the US. It has obtained 3.1 million views and has been shared over 134,5K times. It is categorized as poetry and utilizes various audial, visual, and theatrical components.

4.3.21 Visual components

"My skin and my hair are not accessories

My skin and my hair are not a costume for you to wear whenever it's a "TREND"

The way the opressors now want our hips, our lips, and our curves is nothing new

They want our melanin, our figures, our culture, our music

But when it comes to our struggles

poof

They vanish

When it comes to our history they say we only COMPLAIN

That we should finally move on

But how can we when it STILL happens

All we want is EQUALITY, all we fight for is EQUALITY

But all they hear is "we want more"

Please sit down and listen

All I'm saying is that

My skin and my hair are not accessories

Black Lives Matter"

The printed text in the video is the poetry commentary, making it easier and clear to the audience what words are being spoken. Betty, the protagonist, claims in her poem that the oppressors only want black people for their "figures, culture, [their] music", but refuse to acknowledge the repression. She proceeds to quickly add that her skin and hair are "not accessories, not costumes" for them to wear when it trends. The protagonist uses repetition of this line, making it clear that her (her culture´s) appearance is not an identity trait people can borrow, and something one can take on and off. This metaphor makes a strong impression, as people cannot remove their skin color. Another linguistic device included in this video is onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia is evident in the word use of "poof" to showcase the lack of responsibility when black people share concerns of racism. As a result, it adds excitement and creates a vivid image that engages the audience. Lastly, the protagonist says, "black lives matter", making it clear to which events she is referring in her poem.

The colors and costumes are intertwined and closely linked in this video. The protagonist is wearing a short black top, gold earrings and a colorful skirt with presumably cultural patterns. This look resembles clothing from the 60s, containing colorful patterns. The variation in color patterns and earrings links to the spoken words about culture and accessories. By having a short top and showing more of her skin color, she is able to use her clothing to also highlight her words. There is also a brown dresser taking up large space in the background, which compliments Betty's skin color. This creates the feeling that the color is filling up the whole screen.

Betty's body language combined with her elegant appearance contributes to the overall message and theme that a person cannot change parts of their core identity and appearance. She moves gracefully at a slow pace, not coming across as angry, but rather peacefully expressing her point of view. Using her body as a prop of illustration, she moves her hands across her body when talking about her skin and hair symbolizing oppression with her hands as she pushes them down. She embodies her words through her hand motions. In addition, she moves her body sideways, showing more of her body, promoting proudness of her ethnicity. When addressing "they", the oppressors, she leans forward towards the camera. By creating a close-up shot by moving towards the camera while she addresses "them", the shot narrows the angle of view and reduces the visibility of the background. The effect of this image composition is to capture the audience's attention by filling the frame with the subject only and intensifying the sensation by her moving towards them. At the end of the video, she puts a fist in the air up at shoulder height while speaking the words of "black lives matter". This motion connects her to the other activists seen on social media and in real life, which has become a trademark and symbol for the BLM movement.

The intensifying of the message is also obtained by her facial expression. Betty utilizes the demand gaze, breaking the fourth wall and addressing the audience directly. Her facial expression remains relaxed, but hardly breaks eye-contact, which intensifies the experience.

The choice of angle exhibits the protagonist taking a stand. The subject is shot from a lower angle than eye level. It is a perceptual trick that makes the audience perceive the subject as taller and perhaps more powerful. This positioning of the subject makes the protagonist seem like the dominant part in this interconnection and trade of information and emotion between the subject and viewers. Although she is in the victimized position, she herself chooses a dominant position when speaking to the audience. This highlights her resilience. Moreover, the subject's positioning also makes it more visible how the subject is feeling, revealing both vulnerability and despair.

The bright lighting also contributes to the visual impression of the protagonist. The lighting is a mixture between natural daylight and a filter to complement Betty's skin color. In addition, a few sparks of light like stars appear at some point in her eyes when speaking about the oppressors wanting "…[their] melanin, [their] culture…", depicting the importance and star-like qualities she possesses.

4.3.22 Audial elements

The only audible element present in the video are the spoken words and how the protagonist performs them. The words are classified as dramatic poetry due to the repetition and rhythm of the words, and because she is addressing an audience. At some point, it can be categorized as a soliloquy, by revealing her inner thoughts and emotions. Another component that makes it seem like a soliloquy is through the quick change of pace and engagement when she speaks of those who attempt to use them for their culture and music. Her performance of the words is predominantly soft, with an occasional interjection of harsh sounds. For example, she articulates "accessories" with a k, a stop consonant, creating a grating effect. In addition, she uses words such as "figures" and "culture", following each other, both having harsh consonants. The f sound, being a fricative, presents itself sounding like the word is being spitted from her mouth. Another noticeable sound effect is the word "oppressors", where the */p/* obtains an explosive sound, creating intensity. Likewise, she speaks calmly, articulating and

putting emphasis on each word. She utilizes caesuras, pauses for dramatic effect, and gives the audience time to reflect upon the words received. In other words, she emphasizes the importance of each word to the overall meaning.

4.3.23 Theatrical elements of expression

The theatrical element of truth is shown through the subjects' words of expression, sharing her experience and expectations of black people. She uses common words such as "accessories" and "trend" to amplify her message of skin color not being a costume and to reach a younger audience familiar with this glossary. She raises the question of how black people are exploited for their assets but ignored when fighting for their equality. This is shown through moments of significance, such as using onomatopoeia "poof", when illustrating the lack of responsibility held by the government and citizens in relation to racial injustice. Her costume and hairstyle recall the 1960s, when the *Black is Beautiful* movement emerged during the decade characterized by human right protests. The movement was fronted by black women wearing clothing of culture, embracing their heritage, and challenging the white standards of beauty.

4.3.3 Video 3- by @lovethatjourneyforme

The TikTok video published by Michael Zetterberg in 2020 shows a demonstration against police brutality, having 2 million views. The video is composed of a variety of elements to compel the audience to have empathy for the victims of racial injustice.

4.3.31 Visual components
There are numerous visual components included in this 30 second video.

The first visual feature is the printed text. While there is text included, this video uses soliloquies as the main mode of communication by two people sharing their concern and proudness of their black roots. The text is written in a large font, repeating the spoken words. The effect of this producer choice is making sure the viewer understands the message of the characters. Moreover, to make the message more prominent, Zetterberg has included exclamation marks at the end of some of the more possessive strong utterances.

A second visual element is the colors utilized. The people participating in the protest are mostly wearing black or grey clothing, symbolizing their message of despair and anger. This color choice stands in contrast with the green tree in the background. A tree has often been associated with growth, stability, and tranquility. The protestors standing next to a large still green tree with a semi-loud protest disturbs the peace and stability a tree signifies. However, a tree also symbolizes growth and new beginnings, which is what the protestors are requesting.

The body language is the third visual component present in the video. There are several characters in this video. There are several groups included: the police, spectator protestors, the two main protagonists, and arbitrary people crossing the stage where the actions take place. The police are standing in a straight line with their arms on their nightsticks observing the protestors. The only noticeable movement of the police is how they suddenly have moved closer to the fence and activists, demonstrating more strength and resistance. Some of the spectators are lying on the ground, an allusion to George Floyd lying on the ground and not being able to breathe, while others are standing and observing in the background. The woman giving a monologue is standing right in front of the fence using her arms actively, pointing at the police and leaning her body slightly forward. Using her body in that manner adds emphasis to her words and portrays her as being engaged, intense, and ready to fight for her rights.

The facial expression is the fourth element. This feature emphasizes a character's emotions and might even reveal contradicting feelings that are not made evident through the spoken words.

In this video, there is distance between videographer and the characters, not making it possible to depict the facial expressions demonstrated by the characters. The positioning is another feature of analysis. This TikTok video is shot from a high angle looking down upon the acting unfolding on the street. As a result, we miss the essential feature of close-up shots of facial expressions and props that emphasize human emotions and details. The viewer must rely on the spoken words, props, and body language to analyze the message.

The sixth visual component is the props. Props are additional meaning makers, contributing to the scenery and defining characters into roles. In the role of both protectors and attackers, the police are using nightsticks to demonstrate power. In this case, they are being portrayed as antagonists as the anger of BLM is towards police brutality against black people. In addition, there are fences separating the police and BLM activists. A fence symbolizes keeping something out or keeping something in, which makes us question who the police are protecting, themselves or the protestors? The protesters are using phones to film the event and posters supporting the BLM movement. Posters and people filming the incidents are prominent in BLM protests. Lastly, some arbitrary people are crossing the scene on bikes. This highlights how some people do not stop and take the time to engage and support the movement.

The positioning shows the power hierarchy and the classification of the video. This video is shot from a higher angle overlooking the street where a peaceful protest is taking place. The producer moves the camera sideways to give the audience an overview of the whole stage. Also, this technique separates the producer and the actors, creating a clear distinction between the roles of the actors and the audience as observers. When the actors are being shot from a distance, it excludes the close-up shots revealing the facial expressions and identity of the actors. In this video, the actors are simply used for their function of delivering a message, being more important than who is communicating it.

Costumes are another component that can communicate to the audience parts of a character's personality and mood. Most of the protestors are wearing black or grey clothing with hoodies.

The hoodies have been a symbol throughout the BLM of how black men have been suspects of crime simply by wearing a hoodie. The colors of black and grey are associated with anger, mystery and dominance. Wearing these colors shows the audience the intent of the protest and the mood of anger and despair. The male protagonist is only wearing a black shirt to proudly exhibit his skin color.

Lastly, the element of lighting exposes the scenery. Daylight will display more details than nighttime. The video starts off in daylight as the protagonists speak directly to the police. Suddenly the scene changes, and it becomes nighttime and dark. The protestors claimed earlier that they would protest "all day, every day". The fact that the light changes illustrate how the activists were serious about their claim to protest all day and night until change is evident.

4.3.32 Audial elements

Female narrative:
"And I am terrified that you're going to kill my boy
My boy! my boy!
Terrified!
You have a choice
There are different things you can do
I can't change this"

Male narrative:
My blackness is my strength
My blackness is my beauty
My blackness is my joy, my happiness!
I am proud of being black!"

Sound elements are divided into three categories, music, language, and the spoken words. The spoken words by both the female and male protagonists exhibit anger, desperation, and a reminder of black worth. The speeches are categorized as soliloquies, which declares a person's inner thoughts and feelings without caring how the audience will perceive them. The words spoken display a range of raw emotions, which is why they are categorized as soliloquies. Both speakers use the tool of repetition, of "my boy!" and "my blackness…", dedicating various

positive features to having a black skin. The crowd of protestors are chanting "we are change" and "all day! everyday". The effect of repetition is emphasizing certain words of importance and creating rhythm. This is especially evident when the man is speaking, as he is articulating the words at the same pace. The words "my boy" indicates innocence and youth, while "my blackness" demonstrates blackness as an integrated part of their identity. The woman speaks more freely and informally, evidenced by her use of words with a negative connotation such as "terrified". Alternatively, the man is more reserved in his speech, sticking to his pattern of repetition, pace, and volume. The woman also utilizes the personal pronoun, "you", appealing to the police to alter their behavior and mindset.

At some point she is pointing at her skin while saying "I can't change this", making the message as clear as possible. The other protagonist, the man narrative, is moving a few meters back and forth while pointing at his black body and actively using his arms in a non-aggressive way. At the end of the video, all the characters who have stood quietly in the background are now participating by dancing to live jazz music and later by walking in a protest. The contrast of celebrating their musical roots and having to walk in protest for basic human rights makes the statement exceedingly stronger.

There are several music and sound effects present in this video. After the soliloquies are expressed, there is a small orchestra playing live jazz. The music stands in contrast with the serious utterances being conveyed. Furthermore, in the background there are sounds of music, drums, and car engines. As a result, it demonstrates how life continues despite the protestations and does not stop time to fix the racial injustice in the US.

The language is expressed by the protagonists, the man and woman speaking independently in front of the crowd. The woman is speaking loudly almost yelling her words quickly. It creates an intense atmosphere to listen to a woman desperately pleading through her volume and pace, asking the police not to kill her black son. On the other hand, the man is speaking loudly, but calmly. He is articulating his words clearly at a slower pace than the woman. The woman is expressing her emotions more rapidly through her volume than the male character.

4.3.33 Theatrical elements

The theatrical elements of change, truth and questions become apparent through the visual and audible features present in the video.

Change is associated with altercations in characters, scenery, or time. These altercations affect the dynamics of a character and the audiences' perception of events and the overall message. In this video, there is change in lighting that demonstrates the time perspective of how long the protest lasted. Furthermore, there is visible change in who is the protagonist. It highlights more perspectives of BLM, one that is desperate for her son's life to be safe, and one that is proud to be black. Lastly, there is change in actions. The activists are lying on the ground, dancing, standing and marching. These actions indicate how quickly there can be a turn of events.

The truth revealed through these soliloquies is their despair while honoring and embracing their blackness. In addition, it raises the question of the institutional racism in the police department in the US. Another truth emerging is for *what* and for *whom* people are fighting. The question of *what* the protesters are fighting for is explicitly stated, the equality of all races and an end to police brutality. On the other hand, whom the characters are fighting for is different. The male protagonist is protesting for himself, while the female protagonist is more concerned for her son. Exhibiting herself as a selfless mother, shouting desperately in the streets for the police to spare her son evokes a gamut of emotions. The selflessness she is displaying by focusing on her child while she is also a victim of racial discrimination, demonstrates strength and resilience as a part of black identity.

4.3.4 Video 4 by @blxcklivemxtter

This video, viewed 34.5k times, offers live footage and a news report from a protest in Washington DC in 2020. The TikTok video has a range of elements that display the engagement surrounding BLM in many states in the US.

4.3.41 Visual elements

There is printed text shown in three areas of the screen, providing various information regarding the protest and concurrent events. In the top left corner, the location of the live footage is shown, "near the White House". The White House is associated with a place of power as it is the US presidential residence. In addition, it is a large and grand property. For a protest to occur near this location is calling for national change. The other information provided by the text is that "600-800 national guard members" are requested to move to DC. The National Guard is a state-based military service, providing additional support to existing law enforcement in the whole domestic of US. National Guard members are only requested to other states if a domestic emergency is prevailing, which is revealing the force, determination, and large numbers of the protestors. Lastly, it is revealed through the text that Trump was speaking from the Rose Garden, a known location in the perimeter of the White House. A rose garden is associated with a soft and peaceful place and stands in contrast with the protests happening just outside the perimeter of the garden. Consequently, it demonstrates the different realities in the US. Some citizens live in peace while others fight for basic human rights. The word "National Guard" is an interesting consolidation of words. A guard's job is to protect and not provoke violence. The live footage shows otherwise, the guards catalyzing violence from peaceful protestors. Furthermore, the term "national" is related to a whole

country. Ironically, one could say that the National Guard excludes the protection of some races.

The color palette demonstrates the severity of the situation, using strong primary colors. The red color is utilized to highlight the titles. Red is associated with anger and passion. Red stands out and catches our eye quickly. The background is dark blue, to make the text and live footage more visible and enhance the focal point. Blue is also used in the reporter's suit, neutralizing his appearance and emphasizing his spoken words. Blue is associated with calm, elegance, and intelligence. In the live footage, the National Guard is wearing black and using black gear. Black is not a primary color, but a distinct one. It suggests power, aggression, and authority, linked to the status and function of the National Guard.

Body language distinguishes the protestors and the National Guard, but also changes on the course of events. The first live photos presented are of the National Guard armed in a straight line. The following events show them running aggressively towards the protestors using plate carriers and tear gas, trying to disperse the crowd. The protestors are peacefully gathered in front of the police holding signs or arms by their side. Following the police's violent actions, the crowd runs backwards while some stand still trying to hold their ground. A significant difference is in how both parties act out their intention. The guards actively push the protestors backwards with their weapons and use tear gas to prohibit the entrance of protestors close to the perimeter of the White House. Protestors are peaceful and some are holding signs. Their calm body language highlights their intention, to demonstrate peacefully. Lastly, the facial expression signifies the amplitude and severity of the issue. The news anchor has a serious facial expression, demonstrating his concerns as a fellow black US citizen.

The variety of props and costumes used by the two groups distinguishes their power relation. The National Guard is equipped with helmets, nightsticks, vests, and plate carriers, while the protestors possess flags and posters. Moreover, the ability to inflict pain is greater for the National Guard than for the protestors, and clearly expose the jurisdiction and hierarchy.

Physical appearance plays a role in how we perceive the information they provide. The news anchor is wearing a suit, illustrating formality, and appealing to the rhetoric device of ethos, trusting an orator of representation.

The positioning varies in this video, as there is live footage from a demonstration, the ground, and a news report. As a result, the video shows three separate windows of footage at the same time. It demonstrates the chaotic and unsettled situation on the ground but also through showing three different videos at once. The live footage from the protests is mostly shot from the air, being able to cover the large ground and displaying the mass crowd. The footage filmed from the ground shows the posters, clothing, and the calm movement of the protestors. Furthermore, the lighting is quite dark, resembling the severity of the protest.

4.3.42 Audial elements

The audible elements are limited to background noise from the protests and the two news anchors. The background noise is a combination of people speaking, yelling and sounds from the tear gas being fired which sounds like a small bomb going off. A similarity with a bomb-sound creates fear through the danger associations to that sound. As they are filmed from a great distance, the voices are loud and mumbling, and it is not possible to grasp what the characters are saying.

The spoken words are mostly provided by the CNN anchor, Don Lemon. He imparts that no social issue has every caused a protest like these, that occurred in "every… major… city" in the US. He compares the riots in 2020 to the 1992 L.A uprisings after Rodney King was brutally beaten (Miller, 2022). Highlighting a parallel between similar historic events creates an awareness of the depth of the issue from a time perspective. Racism and racial oppression have become a longitudinal issue dating back to the early existence of mankind. When a new unknown CNN anchor voice interjects to describe the sudden turn in events, he portrays an escalating image of what is happening mid-protest. Although the image he is illustrating is filled with "firing tear gas" and "trying to disperse the crowd" using plate carriers and force, he is expressing the details in a calm tone. Another interesting point is how he is less formal than

Don Lemon, using words as "alright y'all" and "hold on". The effect of this is to appeal to every audience viewer through accessible and understandable language.

4.3.43 Theatrical elements

The theatrical element of change is evident in various ways. Change affects the atmosphere of the play. In this video, there is change in how the events are shot, both from the air and on ground-level. In addition, there is a change in events. At the start of the video, the National Guard and crowd are not moving, and suddenly the National Guard is running towards the crowd in an attempt to disband the protestors. Lastly, CNN alters the news anchors. The effect of all these visible changes creates a chaotic and unsettled experience for the viewer. This experience can create a parallel experience to the one the protestors are having.

There are several truths presented in this video through specific moments. Don Lemon presents statistics and truth of the causalities and injured from the 1992 riots, highlighting the reality and long-lasting battle against racism. Tolstoy argues truth is found in "the tiny bit", which is evident in this video. This bit is identified as the moment the tear gas is fired. The tear gas creates smoke, panic and people falling over. In this moment, the situation escalates and becomes unclear, in terms of movement and sight. A moment becomes significant when characters react momentarily and unconventionally, making us aware of their inner thoughts through their body language or words.

4.3.5 Video 5- by @lgteamgenius

The video by IGteamgenius is informative as it presents information regarding innocent black women that have been murdered by the police due to the color of their skin. The video utilizes numerous elements to convey the message in a creative and informative manner and has received 3.7 million views since it was published in February 2023.

4.3.51 Visual elements

The printed text is one of the main contributors in communicating the intended knowledge. The written text says, "remembering black women lost to police brutality". It states clearly what topic the video will cover. The word brutality has a negative and harsh connotation and conveys the severity of the issue. What follows is a switch between images of the women killed, including their name and age, and images of the police officers. The men who killed them are not mentioned by name. The effect of this is switching the roles, giving the women a voice, and silencing the men.

The colors are the second component evident in this video. There is a large white mansion in the background. This choice of background is significant as white can be associated with purity and anonymity. The white background highlights the colors in front, such as black clothing and the protagonist's orange hair. Orange is associated with heat, fire, and anger, revealing the protagonists' emotions. In addition, to keep the focal point on her, she wears a white shirt to separate herself from the spear carriers. The black clothing worn by the spear carriers creates the effect of not only shifting the focal point to the protagonist, but black also signifies pride in their movement.

The body language and movement are other essential features. The protagonist and spear carriers are holding their fists in the air signalizing unity and solidarity and then change their movement to crossing their hands in the air. This action demonstrates dominance and emphasizes their opinion of the treatment of black people. Another important aspect of body language is the portrayal of the victims and villains. The images used to paint an image of the female victims showcases them smiling and posing in front of a camera, women full of life and innocence. On the other hand, the photographs used of the killers depicts them as unflattering,

serious and in scenes of duty. By depicting the victims and villains against one another, it makes one question what the greatest loss was.

The facial expressions vary in this video. Four of five women are smiling in the chosen images, while most of the men are serious. It portrays the women as kind and approachable, while generating a distance from the men. The rapping protagonist and the spear carriers have serious facial expressions, conveying the topic in an appropriate way.

Props can intensify and make immediate the message of the video. Props used with intention in this video are the steps outside the mansion on which the protagonist and spear carriers stand. Steps can signify a hierarchy, and as the protagonist is standing on top of the stairs, above everyone else. She is the dominant and leading voice. It is also indicating to the viewer that they, black women, deserve to be heard and seen as equals.

The positioning is crucial in this representation. Positioning a large white mansion behind them displays a sense of wealth, signaling that the tables have turned. On the other hand, the mansion could depict how oppression creates a sense of domination and threat overlooking their every move. Furthermore, a mansion is stable and does not move, and could symbolize how black people's lives have improved, but that racism is still very much present.

There are various costumes. The female protagonist is wearing a white shirt that states "you're either part of the solution or part of the problem". The text is not clear or visible but supports the vision of the TikTok video. The spear carriers wear black to put the focus on their actions, rather than on their clothing. Some of the antagonists wear their uniforms in the images presented of them. This is an interesting and ironic choice used by the producer. It shows their position of power to possess a gun, but also the expectation of them keeping people safe, an oath they did not uphold.

The lighting utilized in this video is daylight, with an additional filter displaying bright colors, making all components in the video look neat and distinct.

4.3.52 Audial elements

The music selected goes well with the message. The producer of the video has created her own beat and rhythm to accompany the rapping. There are frequent beats and low pitch to support the resentment and seriousness of the topic being illustrated.

The spoken words are rapped by the protagonist.

> *"I really try to see it from the opposite side.*
>
> *Black woman dead white cop is alive x5.*
>
> *No crime committed by the time he arrived.*
>
> *Cell phones caught it but the bodycam died"*

The woman is attempting to view the issue from the other perspective but makes it clear with evidence that such a perspective does not exist. She repeats five times that a black woman is dead, and the white cop is alive. The ratio of responsibility and who suffered is presented and displays an unequal power balance with a fatal outcome. In addition, there was no crime committed by the victims, yet a fatal action occurred. People have caught the episodes on their phones, yet the police's mandatory bodycams had somehow been turned off. Presenting information through a rap with rhythm and end rhyme, makes the utterances memorable. As a result, this conscious choice by the producer is to demonstrate the main objective of the video, which is to make us remember the unfathomable acts that took place against these black women.

4.3.53 Theatrical elements

The theatrical elements look at how the visual and audible elements combine to determine the overall effect of the features. The theatrical element of change is affected by the change of characters and shots. Changing the shots of the victims rather quickly illustrates the vulnerability of life and how quickly a life can be taken away. Exhibiting images of numerous victims shows the quantity affected when racism permeates an institution.

This TikTok video presents its message, making it as coherent as possible by including words, text, and images of the victims. Moreover, it presents a black perspective on how these women lost their lives, and the lack of accountability by the police department in the aftermath. Questions raised by the producer are how one can feel safe in a country when the department designed to keep the citizens safe are part of the problem. The switching between moments and images evokes emotions of disbelief, anger, and sadness, alternating between displaying the innocent victims and murderers. The techniques used in the video lend to audience engagement and providing awareness about the treatment of black women by the police department.

4.4 Summary

In the following section, I will comment on the most prominent findings by doing a cross-analysis. As mentioned in the introduction, the object of this thesis is to determine the potential for the visual, audial, and theatrical features present in TikTok videos to engage the audience. The examination of these elements of expression showcases the portrayal of the BLM movement from black people's perspective. I will determine what function lies in the individual components and the effect of combining various elements. In this following section, the research questions provided in Chapter One will be investigated in relation to the findings presented in subsection four, using both the quantitative and qualitative processed data to discover possible solutions to these questions. Furthermore, I will determine whether there is a positive correlation between the elements utilized and the number of views. Moreover, the visual elements of body language, sound, props, colors, costumes, lighting, and printed text will be investigated for their significance in the videos and to storytelling. In addition, the various sound components and the theatrical elements of expression will be explored. The emerging theme of identity and power will be analyzed for its significance. These are questions that will be explored and discussed in this section.

The quantitative data will address the first question of the research (1), which refers to what visual, audial, and theatrical elements are used in the videos. The quantitative findings will apply the information that emerged from question (2), which relates to the most viewed features on TikTok. The language and visual elements explore the themes of power and identity

(3). Lastly, the elements are examined through critical literacy and shows how critical literacy can be used to teach BLM in the classroom (4).

4.4.1 Visual components

4.4.12 Body language

The results highlight body language to be a significant element when conveying information, either emotional or factually based information. The emotional information in regards to the individual's personal experience with racial discriminative occurrences. Kulick (2020) explains action to be a movement that can transfer words to a destination of meaning (p. 125). In addition, movement is catalyzed by desires and needs, moving from "sensation to intention". Consequently, it demonstrates the essential element of movement when conveying emotions, as emotions can tell a story as detailed and convincingly as words. There are several ways that body language can embody emotional information.

The first way to reveal information through body language is eye movement, which reacts to the visual stimuli surrounding the subject. The eyes of a character signals to the audience their focal point and establishes a relationship between potential subjects in a play. The focal points are highlighted through the gaze direction showing the salience, or the focus in a frame. Gaze direction is often the demand gaze or offer gaze, the character looking at another object/subject in the image. This finding is made prominent through the quantitative method, while the length of the individual gazes is elaborate on through the qualitative method in the five videos chosen for further analysis. If the glance is sustained, it intensifies the importance of the object/subject at whom the character is looking (Palanica & Itier 2014). Surprisingly, the least used feature found in the quantitative results was demand gaze with a frequency of 17 out of 35 TikTok videos. The demand gaze is an effective tool to connect with the audience by breaking the fourth wall. This result might be due to the categories of videos chosen, as some display live events and are shot from a distance. On the other hand, out of the six most viewed TikTok videos, five used the demand gaze. When the chosen gaze direction is employed, there is a positive correlation between emotional engagement and connecting with the audience.

Gestures are the second way body language can convey a message. There are two characters presented in the videos, the active and passive agents. The active characters use their whole bodies while conveying their intentions. Moreover, they have active arms, either pointing at other characters or the BLM trademark- a fist in the air. The clenched fist in the air symbolizes solidarity. Another way to show action is through leaning their bodies forward, either towards the audience or other subjects in the image like both protagonists in video 3. How a character uses their bodies to deliver the message also shows what type of message they are expressing. The more passive agents have factual-based information, while the active characters are more emotionally based. Setting body language up against each other and creating a contrast is using the theatrical element of antithesis. The most viewed TikTok videos in the data sample is a combination of four art videos and two live events videos from demonstrations. The live event videos clearly show more emotions through body language than the art video, as they are live. On the other hand, the art video clearly demonstrates the perspective of the artist.

4.4.13 Lighting

The role of lighting is primarily to determine the atmosphere and contribute to the mood of the characters. There are four main exposures of lighting. The first display of lighting is natural daylight. Natural daylight has several functions. It exhibits human nature in everyday life. In addition, it unveils the symbol of black people wanting to be heard and *seen*. Contrastingly, dark lighting compliments the atmosphere and mood. In the third video, the protest continues at nighttime, making the scene unsettling as only certain features are shown. The third function of lighting is filters. Several videos use filters to expose and increase awareness surrounding certain details. For example, in the second video by Betty, she uses a filter that makes her skin glow while highlighting black as skin color. This is not an accessory one can add and remove at any given time.

The last display of lighting is smoke. The smoke was produced by a smoke machine in video 1. The smoke contributed to the scenery by creating a suspenseful image. When the smoke clears, it can represent that an event is about to occur, or smoke can have the function of hiding other

components in the frame. In this video, the smoke acts as a coverage of the background, shifting the focus towards the characters and their movement.

4.4.14 Costumes

The costumes reflect and reveal parts of a character's identity and the cultural, economic, and social status of the character (Dixon, 2014, p. 122). In addition, they show the environment and situation in which the characters find themselves. For example, the police uniforms or attire of the National Guard, demonstrate that there is a serious situation with potential threats occurring. The irony of the costume is that the police department has the role of the "protector", while having inflicted violence and discrimination on black people for generations. As a result, the police uniforms show dominance. The roles have switched, creating an ironic contrast of whose role it is to protect its citizens. The citizens and protestors mostly present themselves in black clothing, t-shirts, and hoodies. This provides several indications. The first indication is the anonymity, focusing on the collectivism rather than on the individualism. Also, using the black color evokes the mood. The clothing is not the focal point and what tells the message but can expose the power hierarchy and sociocultural backgrounds.

The costumes also reveal allusions to other historical events. The outfit from video 2 relates to the "Black is Beautiful" campaign featuring black women in the 1960s, promoting skin color as beautiful rather than an unfamiliar and intimidating feature, associated with *othering.*

4.4.15 Colors

There is a range of colors utilized in the TikTok videos. Colors are used to convey emotions and reflect the mood. The most common color palettes usually portray dark colors, reflecting the severity of the BLM situation. There are some distinct colors that stand out. The female protagonist having an orange hair in video 5, is clearly wanting to be seen. Visibility makes it easier to share the narrative. Orange is especially noticeable as it associates with fire. This aspect connects with critical literacy, as any feature can disrupt the commonplace and the illusion of the ordinary, catching the audience's attention. Another color used to grasp the

audience's attention is the primary color red. This color is utilized in video 4 to highlight the news headlines. On the other hand, the nuance of black and white is related to anonymity, letting the events serve as the prime focus.

4.4.2 Sound significance

There is a high frequency of an occurrence of sounds in the processed TikTok videos. The sound used in the videos determines the mood and atmosphere, either heightening or oppressing the mood. Sound awakens moments, by complementing the mood or atmosphere. The sounds recorded in the videos are divided into three categories, background noise, music, and monologue.

4.4.21 Background noise

The background noise is identified as shouting, singing, chattering, and engines running. This is especially evident in the live event videos selected. As the live events gather a large crowd, it establishes rather unclear scenes. As a result, all the sound distractions take away the focus from the main characters, smothering the audience with other noise. Hence, it reflects the chaos of the unsettling situation of racism.

4.4.22 Music

The music found in numerous videos is the mash-up of *This is America* by Childish Gambio and *Congratulations* by Post Malone. Irony permeates this song, as the titles and content underline the lost cause of obtaining equal opportunity and the American dream for all races. It also creates an allusion to police brutality against black people and gun rights through the line of "don't catch you slippin´ now". Moreover, this line demonstrates that black people are less likely to have a chance of redemption after a crime has been committed.

4.2.23 Word choice

The importance of word choice is investigated by the repetition of specific lexis. This subsection will explore how the characters lexicalized their words, and explore the viewers' final lexicalization, how the viewers inflict their own meaning to the chosen words (Janks et al, 2014,

p.72). The most frequent words or utterances are "Black Lives Matter", "I can't breathe", "justice" and "This is America" song lyrics by Glover. These words occur numerous times in several videos and can highlight considerable indications. The first indication is the allusion to Eric Garner, who was killed in 2014, and uttered, "I can't breathe" before the phrase rebloomed after George Floyd was murdered in 2020. This lexis paints an image of a person being stripped of air, the biological necessity of our survival. It becomes a powerful statement when protestors use the pronoun *I*, as "I can't breathe" also relates to them. The characters create an imagery of living with racial injustice and discrimination as being as unbearable as physically not being able to breathe. Another lexis, such as "justice", originally portrays positive aspects of society and equal opportunity. Consequently, these words embody a negative aspect of reality when the lexis is put in a context in which it is clear there is a lack of "justice" and not something successfully obtained. When the viewers are introduced to a new lexis, they bring their own interpretation, which can flip words from having positive connotations to having negative connotations. Furthermore, the assertion "This is America" can create both a positive and a negative connotation. This is based on the person receiving the message and the image shown. In these videos, the images display violence against BLM activists and the despairing psychological effect of racism. Lastly, the declaration of "Black Lives Matter" is associated with the social movement for racial injustice, trying to give a voice to those who are oppressed. All these lexes are capitalized, empathizing the importance and function of each word.

4.4.3 Theatrical elements of expression

The theatrical elements of expression reveal all the components needed in the pursuit of truth. TikTok videos mirror theatrical productions, as both platforms search for and communicate *truth*, not necessarily both in one play and/or video. The TikTok videos are categorized based on content, as some share true facts about BLM, while others share emotional experiences in search of why racism is a continuous issue. Critical literacy has been utilized to disrupt the commonplace on TikTok, by protesting, and asking questions about police and institutional racism. It has become an endless pursuit of the truth, in which no one will ever reach a satisfying level of comfort with an issue that is based on human greed and maliciousness. The

levels of truth found in the videos analyzed can be seen through the *changes*, which results in breaking the fourth wall.

4.4.4 Cross-analysis

The cross-analysis will provide an overview of the synthesized data, drawing conclusions based on both the qualitative and quantitative findings. The main objective of the thesis is to explore how the TikTok -producers engage the audience. Therefore, I investigated how the theatrical technique of breaking the fourth wall is applied in the TikTok videos to expose the potential emotional engagement. Theatrical elements also activate an ethical obligation in which the aim is for the viewer to empathize with the subject experiencing racial injustice is portrayed (Butler, 2012, p. 35). This technique was present on several occasions in the various TikTok videos depicted. Furthermore, this approach is supported by Kulick (2020) who believes "meanings is more often felt than thought" (p.3). The research questions attempt to answer how to engage the viewers emotionally, and as a result how to break the fourth wall.

Research question one (1) addresses what theatrical elements of expression are utilized in TikTok-videos to engage an audience. The theatrical elements chosen for analysis is change, moments, truth, and questions. These components derive in the ultimate search for *truth* to questions about humanity. The questions explored in these TikTok videos concern why black people are still discriminated against, why there are no consequences to police officers for killing unarmed black people, and why equality still does not exist. These questions come from emotional moments in the videos that break the fourth wall in an attempt to connect with the viewer.

The first form to break the fourth wall is the demand gaze. The demand gaze is when the subject looks directly at the camera, the audience. In the poem performed by Betty Kalunga (video 2), she stares directly into the camera and even leans slightly towards it. It creates a stronger connection with the viewer. This is due to eye contact being a fundamental principle in face-to-face communication and social interactions. The movement of the eyes is a part of identity and can reveal emotion and intention. Theory can explain this result by relating eye

contact to being more attention-grabbing. Moreover, people detect demand gaze quicker than averted gaze and rate it as more favorable (Palanica & Itier, 2014). This helps us recognize and uncover people's identities when communicating with them.

A second technique found in the TikTok videos to break the fourth wall is the use of pronouns. Some subjects address the audience directly by using the pronoun "you". By breaking the fourth wall this way, it lowers the existing barrier between the viewer and the action, which has been a safety net for the viewer. This imaginary wall not only acts as a way of observing an event from a distance, but also as a barrier of responsibility. The pronouns destroy the wall and call out the audience. The characters make the audience accountable and put in a position to claim responsibility for their own actions and words through pronouns.

Lastly, the body language by the characters portrayed in the videos can break the fourth wall. How a character moves displays their intentions and feelings. The movement expressed also depends on how the image is shot. The camera angle can help intensify the story and influence the viewer's emotional responses. A character from video 1 punches towards the camera, exhibiting anger and resilience. As her fist becomes larger as it moves closer to the camera, it takes up space in the frame and turns into the focal point at that moment. Movement close to the camera and into the viewer's space becomes a technique to break the fourth wall. Secondly, the character from video 2 leans towards the camera creating a close-up shot, while she speaks the word "you". When an audience can watch from a distance, they can avoid becoming emotionally attached. That emotional connection changes when the subjects move towards the audience's position, invading their position.

The second research question (2) examines what characteristics describe the most viewed BLM videos on TikTok. The study shows there is a significant correlation between the frequency of certain elements with the number of views. There are several findings revealed in these results that can highlight why some videos engage the audience more than others. This subsection will

address which elements are present and which are left out, and questions whether one can determine whether the producers' choices affect the number of views.

The videos discussed in this subsection are shown in the table below.

Least viewed	Most viewed
Video 32 (17K)	Video 15 (10.1 M)
Video 29 (34.6K)	Video 1 (7.8 M)
Video 35 (52.3K)	Video 20 (5.9 M)
Video 31 (61.9K)	Video 26 (63.4 M)
Video 33 (72.9K)	Video 24 (4.1 M)
Video 34 (74.5K)	Video 18 (4.4 M)

Table 5. Demonstrates the least and most-viewed videos.

First, the most-viewed videos have included more components than the least-viewed TikTok videos. They include the demand gaze, which is absent in three of the least-viewed videos. The demand gaze is effective to break the fourth wall and engage with the audience, with the intent of provoking an emotional response. In addition, the component of close-up shots is also absent in three of the least-viewed videos. This demonstrates that the least-viewed videos exclude the features that focus on details. The demand gaze and close-up shots of body language or objects will give more depth to the emotions being conveyed through the narrative. In addition, the close-ups show the important details and characters in the video. Another element missing in two of the least-viewed videos is color contrast. Colors convey moods and atmosphere and highlight the various components in a video. Also, the color contrast highlights certain components and helps distinguish between the components. The colors of red, orange, and yellow are dominant, and catches the audience's attention quicker than cold colors. The color black, used by both many protestors and police officers is an enigmatic color, portraying dominance and power. When both protagonists and antagonists wear black, there becomes a clash in power. The colors are shown in objects, skin color, backgrounds, and clothing. The clothing is a prominent arena of expression in the TikTok videos analyzed. Clothing is "an expression of identity" which highlights one´s socioeconomic

background and emotional state (Janks et al, 2014, p. 121). The emotional state can be identified by a person being totally covered up with a hoodie or showing his/her face. In the TikTok videos analyzed, the protestors mostly wear black normal non-descript black clothing, rather anonymously. The clothing is not the anchorage in these videos but shows what they are protesting.

The most-viewed videos lack the component of change. Change is referenced to change in shots, pace, and volume. The peripeteia, a turn of events, can be escalated through the change of these components (Kulick, 2020, p. 49). However, the absence of this component in the videos still results in many views, indicating that this is not a relevant element. It could also be explained by the length of the video, and perhaps not as necessary as in longer videos.

There are also elements that occur in most videos. All the videos include the element of action, referring to body language. Kulick (2020) highlights the importance of action, as it is "intention made visible" (p. 125). Furthermore, Hegel claims "action is the clearest revelation of the individual", as body language demonstrates the goal the individual holds in a specific situation (cited in Kulick 2020, p. 125). In the TikTok videos analyzed, their producers aim mostly to spread awareness of BLM. However, by using their bodies in a large and quick manner, marking their position, the characters are able to dramatically show their anger in the live event videos. An example from the live event videos that highlight the emotional state of the characters is the body language of shooting their fists in the air and holding signs of protests. Actions reflect the interior life of the actor (Kulick, 2020, p. 127). Moreover, action has a velocity because it has the potential to transform the character, both physically and figuratively, from one moment to the next. Due to the dynamic nature of actions, this movement catches the audience's attention. It is also easier to grasp the attention of the viewer when displaying a moving image rather than presenting a static image.

Secondly, the element of sound is included in both the most and least-viewed videos. Communication can be achieved through the background sound and music, as it establishes the

mood and atmosphere. Sound emphasizes and supports the events unfolding in the movement on the screen. Furthermore, when sound is included with moving images, it may help the viewer remember the video because the events come alive by evoking images. In addition, having the element of sound included in most TikTok videos, demonstrates the importance of this feature when engaging an audience. The sound effects depicted in these videos are background noise, shouting, music and speaking. The videos which include various background noises may signal chaos, not only in their immediate surroundings, but also as a theme. There is no control or definite answer for how to solve the racism permeating institutions and society.

Research question three (3) scrutinizes how the theatrical elements of expression utilized in the TikTok videos present the themes of identity and power. Common themes that emerge from the research are the topics of identity, race and power, and the various ways one's identity is presented. The theme of identity, in relation to racism, is explored through a variety of elements included in the TikTok videos examined. Identity is affiliated with a person's interpersonal and psychologically characteristics. Furthermore, identities are socially constructed through cultural conventions and perception (Janks et al, 2014, p. 3). Foucault labels identity as a subject position, as the language discourse builds and shares our identity with the world (Janks et al, 2014, p. 33). These videos show the importance of identity and the numerous characteristics that are contained within one's identity. This theme is presented through physical and psychological characterization.

The first way to portray someone's identity is through physical attributions, modes of costumes, physical traits, and body language. In most videos where the police are included, they are wearing protective gear and weapons. It shows their position of power and ability to do harm. On the other side, the protestors are wearing black clothing, reflecting their mood, and presenting a serious atmosphere. The color black on objects or clothing is also associated with death, darkness, and danger. The clothing is gender-neutral and does not demonstrate protestors from a higher economic class. Furthermore, this low socio-economic status is also

shown from the lack of any jewelry or items of significant value on the protestors. It is apparent that is black people in low-income areas that are mostly affected by racial injustice.

Conversely, physiological features are emphasized through actions and words. The way a character moves and speaks highlights the mood and emotions. The female protagonist in video 3 demonstrates a stream of consciousness as she does not control her outbursts, but rather bases her utterances on emotions. This moment engages and moves the audience because it depicts the raw, not performative emotions of the BLM impact. Consequently, the woman in video 3 moves slowly with grace and regulates her voice while performing her poem. Although her message is clear, the emotional connection is stronger with the woman in video 2, as she is not restraining her feelings of anger and sadness.

By claiming various identities present in the videos, the characters display a paradigm of power, victimization, and othering in the videos investigated. During (2007) determines there is a "complex structure of dominance" permeating texts, due to the hierarchical power relations within institutional structures (p. 477). The power has been possessed by the authorities and institutions, mostly run by white people. Janks et al (2014) argues that "ranking creates inequality" (p. 34). These videos attempt to present the oppression of black people through various consciously selected techniques. An example highlighting different treatments of groups is othering. Othering is exposing fear of groups to dehumanize them and maintain social differences (Janks et al, 2014, p.33). The videos analyzed focus on group identities rather than on individualism, to enhance our understanding of discrimination towards all black people (Janks, 2014, p. 34).

In these videos created by black people, various theatrical and camera techniques, and language are used in an attempt to reverse the roles of power. One technique, evident in video 5, is shooting the subject from below eye-level, making them seem larger and in a dominant position. Moreover, victimization is shown through images of victims, costumes, and words. In video 3, the costumes indicate a lack of power, as there is a strong contrast to the police wearing protective gear and weapons. It clearly demonstrates who holds the status of power.

The words of desperation in video 3 emphasize the victimization of the black woman, begging the police not to kill her son. Lastly, victimization is evident in the images of black women killed by the police shown in video 5 when the woman clearly states, "black woman dead, white cop is alive".

Lastly, research question four (4) considers what insights a critical literacy approach brings to the BLM movement on TikTok. The critical literacy approach is a social political approach, following four principals. Critical literacy aims to activate an audience by *disrupting the commonplace,* challenging the norms embedded in our society (Vasquez et al, 2013, p. 9). Students also learn to *interrogate multiple perspectives* by recognizing whose voice is presented. In the videos analyzed, the BLM protestors had the narrative. The third principle, *unpacking sociopolitical issues*, helps explore the topic of racial injustice and can be related to students' own experiences or used to uncover discrimination in our immediate society. Lastly, as the TikTok videos portray real events, they encourage students to *take social action*. In conclusion, the critical literacy approach explores TikTok as a new informative platform, how groups are portrayed as others, and sparks critical thinking through multimodal analysis.

5. Conclusion

This section provides an overview, summarizing the main findings and reaching conclusions regarding the guided research questions provided in section 1. In addition, recommendations for further research are suggested.

1) What theatrical elements of expression are utilized in TikTok-videos to engage an audience?
2) What characteristics describe the most-viewed BLM videos on TikTok?
3) How do the theatrical elements of expression utilized present the themes of identity and power?
4) What insight does a critical literacy approach bring to the BLM movement on Tik Tok?

5.1 Main findings

This section will reveal the findings in relation to the provided answers to this study's research questions. The first research question (1) explores the theatrical elements utilized to catch the audience's attention by breaking the fourth wall. The findings showed that visual, audial, and theatrical components were used in the TikTok products. The visual elements are body language, printed text, props, costumes, lighting, colors, positioning, and facial expressions. In addition, the sound elements included are music, background noise and the verbal language. These components are branches from the theatrical elements that explore the deeper meanings of the videos. The theatrical elements of expression examine the overall message, while the message is delivered by the visual and audial features. The theatrical elements used to engage the audience are questions, truth, moments, and change.

There were certain features that characterize the most-viewed videos, answering research question (2). There was a positive correlation between the most-viewed videos and certain characteristics. One observation that distinguishes the most-viewed videos is that they include a larger variety of features. These include the demand gaze and close-up shots, which emphasizes details and the characters to a greater degree. As a result, the research demonstrates that the most-viewed videos that engage a larger audience are videos that focus on the characters, as people are easier to connect with emotionally. These features are utilized to break the fourth wall, the boundary between the audience and the performance, letting the audience participate in the events unfolding.

Through the theatrical elements of truth, questions, change, and moments, the research question three (3) could be addressed. The themes of power and identity emerged. The characteristics of power and identity correlate, as they relate to one other. The identity in these videos conveys whom is being affected by racial discrimination, and what positions they obtain in relation to the power hierarchy. The power hierarchy depicts who is controlling the behavioral norms of society. The theme of power and identity is shown through costumes and body language. The costumes highlight the characters' positions in society. There are mainly two types of people in the videos, the civilians, and the police officers. The police officers are

equipped with props like weapons, protective gear, and uniforms. It demonstrates a hierarchy of power based on social roles. Another feature demonstrating power is focusing on collectivism rather than individualism, which shows the extent of racism. It is not an issue affecting only a few individuals but extends to groups based on ethnicity. The performance with gestures demonstrates the emotions. The National Guard and police officers often cross their arms while having an arm on their weapons, posing a threat, marking their position. The protestors are often active with their arms, showcasing despair and anger. It is easier for the audience to relate to a theme, like identity, because it acts as a *paraiphasis*, the theatrical element of familiarity. Every viewer can connect with familiar emotions, making it easier to activate their empathy.

Lastly, power is also shown through which voice is being heard. These videos are published by black producers, showing a black person's perspective. One principle of critical literacy is to view a social issue from multiple perspectives, this is *the gap* which is left out from the four dimensions model in these videos.

The fourth research question (4) looks at the numerous insights gained from how the critical literacy approach strengthens the analysis of the BLM movement on TikTok. Judith Butler's claim of having to be moved emotionally to act fits well with critical literacy, as it pursues the disruption of the commonplace and forcing one to act by challenging the sociocultural issues embedded in society. Critical literacy does not only emphasize the BLM movement, but it also discovers an effective method that effectively distributes the information through a new technological platform. Critical literacy is a method of looking at the TikTok videos as a learning tool to analyze how information is conveyed through multimodal texts. Moreover, critical literacy examines how the features are used to present a certain perspective. This technique of analyzation can also be used to investigate other multimodal text, either for their engagement surrounding sociocultural issues or as a potential source of criticism, as this is a central principle in the new curriculum.

The main objective of the thesis was to investigate how the theatrical elements of expression were utilized to portray the BLM movement. The theatrical component of *truth* uncovered in the processed TikTok videos demonstrates the emotional depth of racism, the range of emotions, and from the observations of the live protests, it presents the effect it has had on US citizens. Betty from video 2 puts into perspective how black people have been applauded for their music and cultural features, while not being honored as worthy owners of those traits. Another aspect of truth displayed in the videos is people's determination to fight for their basic human rights.

Humans are in constant search of the truth, finding meaning behind injustice and exposing the course in which power is determined by ethnicity. However, the unprecedented truth we find may not be one we want to hear or bear. More importantly, the question remains how we go about moving forward with the unwanted truth to change the cultural course and become an inclusive society which correlates with the intercultural and interracial societies we have today. The classroom, as an arena of intercultural education where critical literacy is actively used to examine multimodal texts, will ensure a new generation of open-minded students being able to create a positive impact on the world.

5.2 Recommendations for further research

When conducting this research, several questions arose for further inquiry. It would be interesting to investigate the visual, audial, and theatrical elements present in TikTok videos, by examining actual responses from students. One possible angle could be to explore how the students reacted to watching these videos, to see if these elements engaged the audience on an emotional level. Furthermore, it would be interesting to study which elements they find the most appealing. This research could be conducted inside classrooms tracking emotional responses. In addition, one could attempt to isolate the elements by responses, by removing either sound or text so see if the videos receive the same responses.

Other recommendations for further research include elaborating on TikTok videos in an educational setting. The TikTok videos can be used to educate children about the BLM movement from a present and historical perspective. In addition, there is an opportunity to study the emotional impact of BLM on pupils by viewing live events from the protests and soliloquies published by individuals in which they share their personal experiences. Lastly, the videos can be utilized to explore and teach critical visual literacy in multimodal texts in this technologically based era. The tools and insight students gain from critical visual literacy is valuable knowledge when examining texts from any technological platform. Further research on this topic has the potential to widen our perspective of visual and audible components and the components' influence on our cognitive and emotional reactions.

There are several potentials for implications in the classroom. Firstly, the research findings offer a known appealing medium, TikTok, to convey information about important scholarly topics. TikTok is a modern platform, which most teenagers are familiar with and actively use. As a result, students might participate more in and be engaged in their own education than if analyzing other types of texts. Secondly, a student does not only investigate the information provided, but also how the facts are delivered. All the components of a multimodal text have the potential to be analyzed and discussed. The students will practice peeling off the many layers of elements, such as sound, images, and verbal and written texts to expose the message of the videos. In my own future profession, I plan to include TikTok in my teaching, as it convincingly shows the range of emotions portrayed in the BLM movement, which is the most important take-away from this thesis. The focus was the theatrical elements of expression utilized to engage an audience, but I found that the historical and cultural insight and empathy I gained was just as valuable.

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