

**Envy, Jealousy, Guilt and the Construction of Whiteness in Contemporary Hollywood
Sport Films**

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Abstract

Taking a psychoanalytic approach the paper argues that envy of the supposedly natural ability of African American athletes and jealous resentment of their social and cultural status underpin such Hollywood sport themed films as the *Rocky* series (1976-2006), where redemption of the white protagonist typically entails the defeat of a black opponent. In the process the white athlete is depicted as ‘underdog’ but – in an inversion of stereotype – possessed of ‘natural’ attributes of strength and stamina that are contrasted with the falseness and constructedness of their opponents. The theme of white man as innocent casualty of a society that rewards style over substance evinces an enduring envy of the exalted status of the ‘black athlete’, who is frequently taught a moral lesson in ‘heart’ and commitment. However, in would-be more liberal and reflexive films that acknowledge and explore the guilt of their white protagonists with respect to athletes of colour who have been personally wronged by them, or wronged by the pervasive racism in sport as indexical of societal racism more generally the redemption narratives privilege the enlightenment, learning and capacity for empathy of the white characters at the expense of the enduring two dimensionality of their black counterparts, who remain as vessels for the containment of guilt rather than characters as such. Superior psychological complexity reproduces a racial hierarchisation that the narrative may appear to undo. Even films that highlight and problematise whiteness as constructed through the envy and jealousy of the ‘black’ Other share this hierarchisation by privileging the association of whiteness with cleverness and dissimulation or with lost innocence, boyhood, tradition and community.

Keywords

envy, whiteness, guilt, jealousy, Hollywood sport films

Kyle Kusz argues that Hollywood sport-themed films exemplify the expression, in contemporary Hollywood film, of white male insecurity ‘in an economically precarious, more diverse and

increasingly globalized America'.¹ Hamilton Carroll similarly maintains that 'embedded in [the] so-called crisis of masculinity' in contemporary Hollywood films is

the claim that white men [are] most adversely affected by the social transformations of the post-civil rights era. The discourse of masculine crisis attempts to [...] recoup political, economic, and cultural authority in the face of a destabilized national consensus.²

This paper extends these arguments by focusing on the representation of the intra- and inter-psychic dynamics of white protagonists and non-white characters in several Hollywood sport films ranging from the reactionary to the ostensibly more liberal in theme, structure and tone. Even where the latter explore and apparently condemn their protagonists' envious resentment of black athletes, 'whiteness' is somehow redeemed, either by contextualising and excusing their emotions and behaviour or through the reassuring presence of other, 'enlightened' white characters.

The paper draws on the applications of 'Kleinian' psychoanalysis³ to the psychodynamics of racism as developed by Dalal, Clarke and others.⁴ Space constraints here prevent extensive elaboration beyond briefly summarising the key ideas and the rationale for their applications in this context, particularly the emphasis on envy and guilt in the construction of racial difference.

Kleinian psychoanalysis derives its concepts from the study of pre-Oedipal infant development. Melanie Klein theorised that infant dependency on the mother or primary carer leads to 'phantasies', ways of representing 'somatic events'⁵ of satisfaction or frustration such that the nascent ego is split into identification with the mother as 'good', nourishing object and 'bad', withholding object, 'introjecting' the 'good' and 'projecting' outwards the 'bad' qualities experienced as threatening to the ego in what Klein called the 'paranoid-schizoid position'. Progression to the 'depressive position' entails infant recognition of the mother's wholeness, difference, and the capacity to experience guilt for the imagined damage effected by psychic splitting and destructive phantasies directed at the 'bad object'. The depressive position provides 'the basis for sociability, appreciation, concern and therefore love'⁶ But recognition and acceptance of guilt and desire for reparation is psychically resisted. Klein focused on envy,

particularly, as an entirely destructive emotion that denies and in phantasy destroys the infant's source of care and nourishment, projecting *into* the mother those unwanted parts of the ego through 'projective identification', seeking to make its 'good object' the container of all that is bad.⁷ Klein distinguished between envy, greed and jealousy in that, while greed involves the desire to introject all that is good and jealousy seeks to exclude a third party through sole possession of the 'good object', envy is entirely destructive.

Kleinian applications show how racism is a form of psychic 'splitting'.⁸ 'Projective identification' in particular helps explain how, as Fanon⁹ stressed, the Other's self-perception as 'black' is framed by projected attributes, while racism's roots in envy and the anxiety associated with the depressive position highlight the contingent complementary construction of the 'subject' as 'white'. As Dalal explains, for envy to precipitate racism the Other 'must be being attacked for some [...] imagined fullness', projected qualities that are desirable and felt to belong to oneself, even if disowned by the 'white' subject. Hence the imagination of racialized Others as 'greedy and untrustworthy'.¹⁰ Hence also the 'pseudo-depressive position' in racist societies, where individual tolerance of otherness is reached, but 'the Other is utilized as a container at a societal level [where the] hurts and violence continue'.¹¹

In twentieth century American popular culture sport has been a key site for the construction of 'blackness' as Otherness through the construction of 'black athletes' as possessors of immense 'natural' athletic power, making them both 'exceptional' and 'typical' of 'blackness': 'nearly human, almost human, and sometimes even super-human [but] very rarely, simply, *ordinarily* human',¹² a status reserved for the white subject. Since Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight boxing champion the 'black athlete' has been an object of envious attack in the cultural construction of whiteness.

Many sport themed films have reiterated or critically explored these envious projections. But while the latter might be seen as forms of guilt acknowledgement and reparation they tend to redeem their white protagonists by rendering them objects of sympathy or even empathy,

contextualizing and implying mitigation of their actions, not least through motivation by jealousy rather than envy.

Sylvester Stallone's performance as *Rocky* (1976), the ageing Italian-American boxer given an opportunity to fight the African-American world heavyweight champion Apollo Creed to mark the 1976 bicentennial celebrations was the prototypical fantasy of 'white' American masculinity as disadvantaged and downwardly mobile in the context of post-Civil Rights America and 'Affirmative Action' measures.¹³ *Rocky* directly invoked the image of Christ's resurrection from the film's opening in a converted church featuring a mosaic of Jesus,¹⁴ while Stallone's/ Rocky's Italian-American identity reflected the growing hyphenation of American identities as white Americans distanced themselves from the history of slavery by dating their immigrant origins to Ellis Island, not Plymouth Rock.¹⁵ Rocky's training with carcasses in a meat freezer signified his virtual death prior to 'resurrection' by 'going the distance' against Creed. A hybrid of Muhammed Ali in his brash loquacity and the infamous boxing promoter Don King, Creed arranges the fight himself, often appearing in a three piece suit. His climactic fight entrance dressed first as George Washington then Uncle Sam signifies the film's contrasting of black ascendancy and white downward mobility.

While *Rocky*'s rhetorical structure depended on the notion of the naturally gifted 'black athlete', Rocky's 'moral' (if not actual) victory exposes Creed's artificiality by inverting the stereotypical mind/body duality. If Creed is all language and mind games (but with 'skin deep' sincerity and only a money-worshipping 'creed'), Rocky is all 'heart', discovering an inner worth beneath his white skin, which he insists on his trainer Mickey cutting when his eye swells so that the fight can continue, but also so that the blood can flow and he can *see*. In this envious attack Creed is first elevated, then evacuated of all substance as Rocky progressively *grows* in substance.

Indeed the envy is here projected onto Creed himself in his grandiose pretensions, while actor/writer Stallone appropriates 'blackness' by taking the detail of meat freezer training from the biography of black boxer Joe Frazier.¹⁶ While Rocky is Jesus-like in his masochistic submission, racist envy is displaced onto his friend Paulie whose request to Rocky to 'his lungs punch out' is an attack on Creed's supposed corporeal vacuity.

In the final Rocky film, *Rocky Balboa* (2006), the 60 year old Rocky implausibly returns to face a champion called Mason ‘The Line’ Dixon. If anything envious ‘white’ resentment of the ‘black athlete’ in this 21st century film is more overt, Dixon’s name alone ambiguously signifying either progressive ‘racial’ integration or the uppity black who has crossed the historic line separating the southern slave owning States from the north, a line running close to *Rocky*’s Philadelphia setting. Visually contrasting Rocky and Dixon from its opening dissolve from the hunched Rocky silhouetted against car headlamps to fight fans throwing ice cubes at Dixon as he easily wins his latest fight while a commentator remarks, ‘the world of boxing is hoping for a warrior who thrills us with his passion’, racial stereotypes are again inverted: the passionless black ‘iceman’ versus the intensely passionate white guy, his blackened silhouette a further variation on the ‘white’ appropriation of blackness. And while Creed was practically boxer, manager and promoter in one, Dixon is a ‘forty million dollar slave’¹⁷ in thrall to sport’s commercialism, surrounded by manipulative white managers and a metaphorically almost luminous white training gym. Stallone’s DVD commentary explains the theme, that such athletes are ‘so superior in their abilities and so protected by management, they really never get a chance to show what it would be like if they were just playing for nothing’.¹⁸ Dixon’s lack of ‘passion’ codifies the film’s cultural ‘racism without racists’,¹⁹ implying that blacks do not work hard enough and are passively manipulated.

By contrast Rocky, visually associated with the dereliction of inner city Philadelphia and revisiting his youthful haunts, now populated by a seemingly exclusively white, largely unemployed ‘underclass’ re-ignites nostalgia for a white community of cultural plenitude, the playing of Sinatra’s ‘High Hopes’ from Frank Capra’s film *A Hole in the Head* (1959) as he enters the stadium invoking a ‘golden age’ of Italian American identity, while his ‘Jack Dempsey’ shirt and taking under his wing the now grown-up ‘Little Marie’ from the original *Rocky* associates him with white Irish America. His beacon of hope to his ‘white’ community is a near-parody of the individualist neo-liberal anti-welfarist message of 2000s America²⁰ in his ‘reflexive sado-masochistic’ risking of death.²¹ He also befriends, as a quasi-adoptive father, Marie’s son Steps, whose absent Jamaican father alludes to the stereotype of black men’s refusal

of paternal responsibility, and whose name surely invokes Rocky's famous training run up the Philadelphia Museum of Art steps. Rocky adopts a rescue dog that Steps names Punchy. Oblivious to, or playfully accepting of Steps' jab ('Punchy' suggests 'punch drunk', but his rescue status might represent Steps himself), Rocky becomes the good (white) father Steps never had, containing his envious adolescent attack without crumbling or leaving. Christ-like in *Rocky*, now he has a God-like ability to save others, including his own son from financial district yuppie oblivion and ersatz Irish theme pubs. When, fixing Little Marie's front door light he says 'let there be light', the obvious joke nonetheless encapsulates the film's theme of the great white father who, by example, saves the white inner city poor, fatherless blacks and emasculated service industry white kids alike.²²

In would-be more liberal and reflexive films that acknowledge and explore their white protagonists' guilt regarding athletes of colour personally wronged by them or by the pervasive racism in sport as indexical of societal racism more generally, redemption narratives nonetheless privilege the enlightenment, learning and capacity for empathy of the white characters at the expense of the enduring two dimensionality of their black counterparts.²³ *Gladiator* (1992), *Jerry Maguire* (1995)²⁴, *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), *Resurrecting the Champ* (2007) and *The Blind Side* (2009) exemplify this tendency. In *Resurrecting the Champ*, for instance, as indicated by the white flash in the film's poster, the story revolves around the moment of enlightened epiphany for the white sports journalist who, by ultimately confessing the sins of poor research and misinterpretation in his career resurrecting discovery of a homeless black boxer, is redeemed, 'saved' and so successfully reunited with his estranged partner and son. Echoing Kirk Douglas and Woody Strode's characters in *Spartacus* (1960), *Gladiator* suggests that the white protagonist's experience of a form of slavery (a boxing promoter has 'bought' him by buying his father's gambling debts) enables empathetic understanding of his black counterpart. The trailer voiceover proclaims that 'no-one owns Tommy Riley, no-one'.

Of the recent titles, *The Blind Side*²⁵ is an interesting instance of a more neoconservative partial engagement with issues of race and racial disadvantage in its 'true story' narrative of a wealthy, devoutly Christian and Republican white Tennessee woman, Leigh Anne Tuohy who charitably adopts a homeless black teenager with little education and oversees his induction into the school

American football team as a 'left tackle' whose task it is to protect the quarterback's 'blind side' from oncoming attackers. The film's title has multiple additional and contradictory potential meanings: the problematic blindness of wealthy whites to racial social hierarchisation, the necessity of blindness to racial difference or the blind side of Mike's potential, which is perceived only by his adoptive white mother. She is shown in the film's poster gently guiding Mike towards the light in a visualisation of the film's 'Christian' message. Leigh Anne's 'colour blind' liberalism with respect to Mike entails a form of racial splitting. He is inducted into her white family through differentiation from the slum dwelling blacks who threaten him. She warns them that if they threaten 'my son, you threaten me'. The trailer emphasises the maternal/filial dyadic affection between the two in a series of look/reverse look shots, a kind of Winnicottian maternal mirroring culminating in her explanation to Mike that he must imagine the quarterback as Leigh Anne herself to perform his role as blind side tackle. So this is actually a conditional form of maternal mirroring: Mike must see himself through the gaze of his adoptive white mother in order to succeed. Separated and differentiated from the other male blacks who make lewd sexual remarks to her, Mike's potentially threatening sexuality as a huge black man is reassuringly eliminated as he is directly compared by Leigh Anne in the story to Munro Leaf's (1936) gentle flower-smelling character Ferdinand the Bull, an explicit comparison that both equates him with nature and eliminates his potentially threatening sexual drive. Likewise his role as protector of the quarterback (a position occupied almost exclusively by white athletes in American football) turns the imagined violent threat of this physical colossus into a known, usable asset whose inherent strength and capacity for violence can be productively channelled. The blonde Leigh Anne (Sandra Bullock) is a paragon of *white* intellectual virtue who unselfishly enables her adopted son to realize his supposedly 'natural', untrained ability. Indeed the poster, showing them wearing identical colours, emphasizes the disparity between Mike's enormous butt and Leigh Anne's slender body. Mike's race is only an issue for the evidently redneck father of an opposition team player. Thus race and structural disadvantage are both acknowledged (perhaps also through the title's multiple connotations) and denied as being of any material significance, as the individual act of a female variant on the 'white savior'²⁶ (Vera and Gordon, *Screen Saviors*) precludes the need for any political, structural attempts to redress

racialised social disadvantage. Hence a classic case of what Dalal calls the ‘pseudo-depressive position’ with respect to race, a combination of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism in its tale of white enablement of individual black physical competitive potential and self-determination in the brutal sport of American football through an act of individual Christian charity that leaves otherwise untouched the racial and economic geography of America.

One of the more complex cases, Norman Jewison’s *The Hurricane* (1999) dramatises the wrongful triple murder conviction of the boxer Rubin ‘Hurricane’ Carter in New Jersey in 1967 and the later re-examination of evidence leading to his 1985 release.²⁷ The film moves between flashbacks to Rubin’s first wrongful conviction as a child; his boxing success, climaxing in a clearly unfair judges’ decision against him in a world title fight;²⁸ his conviction for murder; publication, while in prison, of his autobiography;²⁹ and the re-investigation of his case, inspired by Lesra, a teenage black boy from Brooklyn who encounters Rubin’s book while under the benevolent tutelage of three affluent white Canadians who are fostering and preparing him for College education.³⁰ Though Lesra inspires his fosterers to re-investigate the case the film visually emphasises his agency in choosing the book. As he reads we hear Rubin’s voiceover framing each flashback sequence, so that the story is ‘told’ through the interlocking narratives of generationally distinct black American characters, with the somewhat interchangeable Canadians having only vague ‘back stories’. The film acknowledges the racist guilt of the American judiciary, and is clearly intended as a reparative exercise.

Rubin is certainly closest, in the film, to being a protagonist. We witness his initial, experientially grounded wariness, framed by his own words: ‘everything that matters, I lost at the hands of white folks’. He survives prison by remaining in his cell, waking only at night, a form of psychic splitting through which his identity (but only partial subjective integrity) is maintained by refusing to recognise his imprisonment. However, his ‘character arc’, with Lesra’s, involves enlightenment – literally – by the Canadians. Having defensively maintained his identity as a ‘black’ man by refusing to recognise the judicial system he reproduces his objectification as a black prisoner. Through trust, his splitting of black from white is slowly undone. The Canadians have an almost angelic presence, visualised repeatedly in the background or to one side with looks of loving care and concern in scenes with Lesra and Rubin.

But when Lesra's reading of Rubin's book inspires him to train with a punchbag, in the foreground the blonde, maternal Lisa starts to read Rubin's book. Significantly, too, it is she who, her face illuminated by her table lamp, receives Rubin's desperate phone call. She is flanked by fellow Canadians Terry and Sam, with Lesra behind her as she reports that Rubin says he 'can't do the time'. Like the 'good' mother, she can contain and help positively channel destructive and self-destructive impulses.³¹

Other white characters also prove altruistically benevolent. A prison guard offers him standard issue, but number-less white prison pyjamas as a protective compromise between prison regulations and his already severely punished refusal to wear the uniform.³² In this probably fictional scene the connotations of the white pyjamas are unmistakable, given the colour's association with peace and neutrality. In the climactic court hearing Carter's nemesis throughout the film, the mouth twitching corrupt police officer Della Pesca,³³ shown earlier to have elicited false witness statements is contrasted with the implied wisdom of the Federal Judge sitting parallel to his bench to *hear* – colour blind – the case for presenting new evidence, verbal reason and logic defeating *visually* informed prejudice.

Rubin and Lesra's transcendence of *their* racialised psychic splitting enables white viewers to contain the guilt of structural racism. Canada is invoked as an enlightened parental State ultimately emulated, despite Rubin's experience in New Jersey, by the Federal United States legislature. The film thus reproduces a mind/body, intellect/emotion, parent/child, white/black duality in which 'good' white people undo the tampered evidence of 'bad' white people in order to enable the entry, into full subjectivity, of poor black people.

Finally, some sport themed films set out to highlight and problematise whiteness as constructed through envy and jealousy of the 'black athlete'. But here too whiteness is often redeemed, as in *The Fan* (1996), where love turned hatred of a selfish (black) baseball star is contextualised by the sense of loss of (implicitly white) community. The narrative is somewhat reminiscent of Anthony Elliott's psychoanalytic reading of the psychological motivation of John Lennon's murderer, Mark Chapman. In Elliott's analysis, Chapman projected an idealized vision onto

Lennon, introjecting an enhanced 'good object', but 'discover[ing] that the celebrity is unable to transcend the trials and tribulations of everyday life [he] comes to despise the once-loved celebrity and to entertain fantasies of revenge for the humiliating betrayal'.³⁴ Chapman's inability to experience Lennon as an independent 'object' thus lead to literal destruction of this now 'persecutory' object. For *The Fan*'s white protagonist Gil, first a salesman for, then fired by the knife company founded by his father, his baseball idol Bobby cannot represent, as a 'compensatory hero'³⁵ the idealized, implicitly white world of his childhood baseball heroes and the paternally and economically secure world they represent to him. Even when Bobby hits a home run in exchange for his kidnapped son's life, Gil – gazing at his image on the stadium screen having momentarily 'recovered' his white identity – turns to destroy Bobby by pitching his father's knife at the object of his envious resentment on whom that recovery depends. He is shot dead in a hail of police bullets, the visualisation of his death resembling depictions of Saint Sebastian's masochistic martyrdom. The film concludes with a poignant pan across press cuttings of Gil's 'Little League' baseball exploits. Gil is both destructively envious and an object of sympathy. The strings accompanying this scene emphasise the tragedy of Gil's lost boyhood, paternal connection and white community.

O (2001) transposes Shakespeare's *Othello*'s Venetian military setting to a high school basketball team whose star, Odin, the school's only black student is deeply envied by his teammate Hugo.³⁶ Hugo's voiceover monologues parallel Iago's bitter soliloquies in *Othello*, but shift somewhat Iago's envy of fellow soldier Cassio's elevation to Othello's lieutenant to direct envy of Odin himself. The film's key visual motif is the metaphorical device of hawks and doves. While the play is suffused with animal imagery,³⁷ including the ensnaring of birds, this is an innovation. Hugo likens Odin (whose name invokes the (implicitly white!) Norse god of war)³⁸ to a hawk, 'powerful, determined, dark', enviously expressing his desire to be a hawk (rather than one of the white doves whose images bookend the film), and so to 'soar above everything and everyone'. Thus, while his theft of the team mascot, a live hawk, signifies his plan to ensnare Odin by inducing his jealousy of his girlfriend Desi's intimacy with friend and trusted team lieutenant Michael, his theft indicates his desire to *be*, by metaphorically having, his rival. So envious is Hugo of Odin as supreme 'black athlete' that he destroys him by encouraging Odin's jealous insecurity, making him what from the outset he clearly is not: the 'bad nigger' of

‘white’ American imagination. This is ‘projective identification’, the forcing of unwanted, disowned bits of the psyche into the Other. Thus, while having initially loving and tender sex with Desi, Odin sees in the mirror the growing object of his jealous hatred, Michael, becomes more aggressive and ignores Desi’s pleas to ‘stop’. Indeed his nickname ‘O’ might very well stand for ‘Other’. When he tears away the hoop in an enraged effort to win a ‘slam dunk’ competition, he holds aloft then hurls to the floor the severed ‘O’. He has become Hugo’s predatory hawk, while Hugo, the ‘dove’ remains inscrutably above suspicion.

O also cleverly uses Lodovico’s metaphor of Iago as ‘viper’ in *Othello* to highlight both Hugo’s misogyny and repressed homosexual desire for Odin. He initially arouses Odin’s jealousy by assuring him that ‘white girls are snaky’, a classic projection of his own qualities onto the female Other later visually suggested by a serpentine spiralling upward camera tracking shot as he explains his plans to Odin.³⁹ Not content with eliminating Michael, he desperately wants to eliminate Desi too (on hearing Odin’s desire to kill Michael he replies ‘that’s a big step – what about Desi?’), suggesting that his plan to destroy Odin is driven by both envy and (like Iago)⁴⁰ homosexual jealousy of his female and male rivals for Odin’s affection.

However, *O* nonetheless heightens *Othello*’s white/black, mind/body duality. When Odin finally realises that ‘I got played [by] this white prep school motherfucker’, the retrospective passive voice confirms Hugo’s intellectual agency.

Moreover, one crucial change from *Othello* fundamentally alters Hugo’s motive, making him more sympathetic than Iago. Shakespeare’s symbolically paternal Duke of Venice becomes team coach ‘Duke’ Goulding, Hugo’s *father* in *O*. Thus when Duke publicly announces that ‘I love [Odin] like my own son’, and he, Odin and Michael embrace, Hugo is doubly displaced. His homosexual jealousy extends to Duke’s favouring of Odin, his plan motivated by the desire to recover the lost love of the *white* father, a loss poignantly signalled to *us* when Duke summons him to discuss Odin’s altered behaviour, but remains invisible as the shot frames only the seated Hugo through an open doorway.⁴¹

This change renders Hugo a 'victim' of the supposed alliance between white paternal authority (personalised as his father) and the variation of 'affirmative action' represented by Odin's presence in the elite school principally or exclusively through athletic accomplishment. *O* thus somewhat contradictorily deconstructs and 'explains' Hugo as both the author of Odin's actions and authored *by* the situation in which he – by implication – *unfairly* finds himself. He is, after all, not so far removed from *Rocky*'s lovable white 'palooka'.

Notes

¹ Kyle Kusz, 'Remasculinizing American white guys in/through new millennium American sport films', *Sport in Society* 11, 2-3 (2008): 210.

² Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

³ Melanie Klein, 'Notes on some schizoid mechanisms', in Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (London: Vintage, 1957/1975), 1-24; Melanie Klein, 'Envy and Gratitude', in M. Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (London: Vintage, 1957/1975), 176-235.

⁴ Farhad Dalal, *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization: New Perspectives from Group Analysis, Psychoanalysis and Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2002); Simon Clarke, *Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Racism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Simon Clarke, 'Psychoanalytic Sociology and the Interpretation of Emotion', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 33, 2: 145-163.

⁵ Thomas H. Ogden, *The Matrix of the Mind: Object Relations and the Psychoanalytic Dialogue* (London: Karnac, 1986), 11.

⁶ Clarke, 'Psychoanalytic Sociology and the Interpretation of Emotion', 146.

⁷ Klein, 'Notes on some schizoid mechanisms', 8.

⁸ Dalal makes the link between Klein's therapeutically derived concepts and the analysis of racism as follows: 'Klein says that the internal world (internalized and endogenous elements) are hidden from view and so cannot be accessed directly. So the internal is projected into the external, in part, to make it visible and so more accessible. [...] This theory leads one to suppose that the fear of the alien Other is really a projected fear that properly belongs in the internal world of the subject. [...] The theory suggests that the wish to purge the external (political) body of alien objects is really a displacement of the wish to purge the internal body of the unassimilated objects that one feels persecuted by' (*Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization*, 45-46).

⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto, 1952/1957).

¹⁰ Dalal, *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization*, 44. Simon Clarke traces racist envy to 'the anxiety associated with reparation in the depressive position. We perceive others as possessing something good that has been stolen from us; jobs, cultures, ways of life. We try to take it back, but we cannot have it all (greed), so we destroy it (envy). [...] The depressive position involves fear, anxiety and despair about the ability to both make reparation for those destroyed in phantasy and to overcome one's own destructiveness. [...] Envy is therefore a projective and destructive attack which stands as a barrier to reconciliation in the depressive position. The racist seeks to destroy the good that he cannot have. Excluding and persecuting others not only alleviates the discomfort of

envy but also of guilt and depressive anxiety' ('Psychoanalytic Sociology and the Interpretation of Emotion', 157-158).

¹¹ Ibid., 50.

¹² Ben Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics: the Sporting Black Diaspora* (London: Sage, 2011), 2-3.

¹³ As Thomas Ross maintains, the notion of 'innocent white victim' of Affirmative Action inevitably 'triggers at some level its rhetorically natural opposite [the] undeserving black taker' ('Innocence and Affirmative Action', in Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 28. In the *Rocky* films' reactionary morality tale, apart from Apollo Creed Rocky faces a variety of, by implication undeserving usurpers, from the black boxer who is given his gym locker in *Rocky* to the black foreman who fires him from the meat freezer in *Rocky II* (1979) to the ultra-violent 'black buck', Clubber Lang in *Rocky III* (1982) and the obvious Don King fictionalization, George Washington Duke in *Rocky V* (1990).

¹⁴ For a discussion of *Rocky*'s Christian iconography, see Joel W. Martin, 'Redeeming America: Rocky as ritual racial drama', in Joel W. Martin and Conrad Ostwalt, *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 125-133.

¹⁵ Matthew F. Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 9.

¹⁶ Jack McKenna, 'Joe Frazier – the Real Rocky', <http://www.boxingnews24.com/2011/11/joe-frazier-%E2%80%93-the-real-rocky/>. *Rocky* was perhaps the classic instance, in 1970s Hollywood cinema, of symbolic 'vampirism', 'suck[ing] the blood of moral indignation' from non-Whites in the depiction of the white working class as economically and culturally disadvantaged by comparison with their Black, Latino and Native American counterparts (Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley S. Steinberg, 'Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness: Reconfiguring white identity in a pedagogy of whiteness', in Joe L. Kincheloe, Shirley S. Steinberg, Nelson M. Rodriguez and Ronald E. Chennault, *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 14.

¹⁷ William C. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: the Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006).

¹⁸ *Rocky Balboa* DVD Director's Commentary (Twentieth Century Fox, 2007).

¹⁹ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 28-29.

²⁰ *Rocky Balboa* returned to the Fishtown/Kensington districts of Philadelphia featured in *Rocky*. Fishtown was historically a predominantly white working class inner city neighbourhood in an increasingly segregated city. The visible decay reflects the decline of industry and unionized jobs in the area (Robert O' Brien, 'Unemployment and Disposable Workers in Philadelphia: Just How Far Have The Bastards Gone?', *Ethnos* 71, 2, June 2006, 173). Rocky's return to the ring is practically a parody of the discourse of self-empowerment through discipline in neo-liberal welfare reforms (Barbara Cruikshank, 'The Will to Empower: Technologies of Citizenship and the War on Poverty', *Socialist Review*, 23(4): 29 –55).

²¹ David Savran identifies the widespread cultural phenomenon of 'reflexive sado-masochism' as symptomatic of neo-liberal individualism in contemporary cultural constructions of white American masculinity. See *Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1998). Through his visibly 'tortured body' in the *Rocky* and *Rambo* films (Richard Dyer, *White* (London:

Routledge), 155) and through the circulation of numerous stories of his excruciating training regimes via interviews and biographies etc. (e.g. Jeff Rovin, *Stallone! A Hero's Story* (London: New English Library, 1985)), Sylvester Stallone became a prime exemplar of this phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s. The white man's muscles are always *made*, cultivated through self-punishment, rather than (by contrast with the imaginary 'black athlete') *given* natural attributes.

²² Rocky thus typified the white 'savior' in Hollywood cinema. As Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon argue with regard to the abundance of white 'screen saviors' in Hollywood cinema, they act as 'social therapeutic devices' that 'help us cope with the unjust racial divide by denying or obscuring white privilege and the practices on which it depends' – *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 10. When *Rocky Balboa* was released, the firm that had marketed Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) was hired to pitch the film 'directly at a Christian audience. Stallone also held a teleconference in which he addressed a variety of religious leaders on his own Catholic rebirth and on the ways in which *Rocky Balboa* could be used "as an effective outreach tool" – Kasia Boddy, 'Rocky's American Dreams', http://www.opendemocracy.net/arts-film/rocky_4265.jsp. The marriage of Christian iconography and neo-liberal individualism is indicative of the intersections of neoconservatism and neoliberalism.

²³ Such films' acknowledgement of 'white guilt', directly through characters' words and actions or indirectly through the fact of the films having been made at all reproduces 'white privilege' (Frances V. Rains, 'Is the Benign Really Harmless?: Deconstructing Some "Benign" Manifestations of Operationalized White Privilege', in Kincheloe et al., *White Reign*) by focusing on the white *subject's* registering of sympathy for black suffering, thus making possible a confessional 'narrative of redemption' for whiteness without addressing the material conditions through which white privilege is reproduced. As Leslie G. Roman argues, 'redemption discourses claim that loving identification with, and caring for, the "racial other" partially overcomes and appropriates what the racially privileged are *not* able to know (consciously) from their own *direct experiences* – that is, the concrete effects of racism' ('Denying (White) Racial Privilege: Redemption Discourses and the Uses of Fantasy', in Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Linda C. Powell and L. Mun Wong, *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society* (London: Routledge, 1997), 274).

²⁴ Space restrictions prevent extensive discussion of these films. *Jerry Maguire* is perhaps the quintessential exemplar of the narrative of a white 'man in crisis' redeemed by his rescue of a black male friend. Rod is supposedly unable to capitalise on his athletic ability as an American football wide receiver because he fails to convert his emotional commitment to his family into a saleable 'media-friendly' persona. He is hampered by a codedly racial 'attitude problem', an off- and on-field aggression with media and team-mates alike and a refusal to 'dance', to play into unthreatening racial stereotyping, however popular it might make him. Jerry is hampered by romantic commitment phobia, despite working for nothing while seeking a new contract for Rod. Each is reformed by overcoming their splitting of personal and professional, but moving in opposite directions: after a catch to score a touchdown which proves his 'heart' as a player, but which leaves him unconscious, Rod awakens and 'showboats' for the cameras in order to maximise his popular appeal and help to secure a lucrative contract. Jerry learns from Rod's wife's concern for her husband his own love for and commitment to his wife Dorothy. Although each character must incorporate something of the other, the narrative reproduces the distinction between the cerebral (overwhelmingly white) quarterback in American football, who distributes the ball to the (more frequently black) receiver. Courtesy of Jerry's coaching, Rod learns to perform his 'blackness' more pragmatically when it 'counts'. Jerry learns to *feel* with his heart, and the combination of the two results in Rod's longed-for contract, but it is delivered through Jerry's negotiations. He is the protagonist, learning to resolve his white masculinity in crisis by helping his black client to adjust to the 'realities' of self-commodification as a 'black athlete' without losing his 'true' identity, and learning from Rod the value of openness and honesty in his personal life. This narrative of white guilt and reparation is also a decidedly neoliberal one.

²⁵ Based on Michael Lewis' *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

²⁶ Vera and Gordon, *Screen Saviors*.

²⁷ Carter's was one of the most famous cases of miscarriage of justice in US legal history (Paul B. Wice, *Rubin "Hurricane" Carter and the American Justice System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000)). Carter was convicted, along with a younger black man, John Artis, on the basis of questionable eye witness evidence. Among Carter's many celebrity white supporters was Bob Dylan, whose song 'The Hurricane', released in 1975, widely publicized Carter's wrongful conviction in a detailed eight minute narrative of the case – see James S. Hirsch, *Hurricane: the Life of Rubin Carter, Fighter* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 123.

²⁸ Although boxing disappears from the film's narrative at a relatively early stage, the theme of racist envy of his social and economic elevation as a 'black boxer' is highlighted when Della Pesca, the police sergeant who dogs him throughout the film sneeringly addresses him as 'Mister fuckin' champion of the world'.

²⁹ Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, *The Sixteenth Round: from Number 1 Contender to Number 45472* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill, 2011 (orig. pub. 1973)).

³⁰ The Canadians, Lisa Peters, Terry Swinton and Sam Chaiton belonged to a Toronto commune. Chaiton and Swinton's published account of their involvement of the case formed the basis for the film – Sam Chaiton and Terry Swinton, *Lazarus and the Hurricane: the Freeing of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

³¹ Interestingly, Hirsch's account (*Hurricane, the Life of Rubin Carter*, 207-316) describes a rather less harmonious relationship between Carter and the Canadians. Carter reportedly periodically fell out and ceased contact with Lisa, the commune leader, depicted by Hirsch as rather dictatorial.

³² According to Hirsch (*ibid.*, 95), Carter's wearing of pyjamas in the prison dated from his hospitalisation for an eye operation. He remarks that on return to the prison 'wearing pajamas and slippers [...] no one touched him'. The character of the benign prison officer, who also appears at the ultimate court appeal, seems to be based on the officer who reputedly protected Carter's book manuscript during a search of his cell (*ibid.*, 105).

³³ This character must be a fictional composite of several police officers. Vincent DeSimone, the policeman who had been involved with Carter's various convictions from an initial juvenile offence to his ultimate conviction died in 1979. Della Pesca's presence in the Appeal courtroom offers a rhetorical visual contrast with the 'good' white characters of the Canadians, the benign prison officer and Federal judge.

³⁴ Anthony Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 140.

³⁵ Benjamin G. Rader, 'Compensatory Sports Heroes: Ruth, Grange and Dempsey', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 16 (4), 11-22, 1983.

³⁶ Directed by Tim Blake Nelson and written by black American Brad Kaaya, *O was* originally scheduled for release in 1999, but was delayed by two years following the coincidental Columbine High School shootings in April 1999 - see Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, 'The tragedy of whiteness and neoliberalism in Brad Kaaya's *O/Othello*', in Daniel Bernardi, ed., *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and contemporary Hollywood cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 233.

³⁷ Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 335.

³⁸ His full name – Odin James – also invokes the infamous OJ Simpson case through surely deliberately playful intertextuality. For a discussion of these resonances, see Barbara Hodgdon, 'Race-ing *Othello*, Re-Engendering

White-Out, II', in Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose, eds., *Shakespeare, the Movie, II: Popularizing the plays on film, TV, video, and DVD* (London: Routledge, 2003).

³⁹ The iconography here also clearly suggests the Garden of Eden.

⁴⁰ Martin Wangh, 'Othello: the tragedy of Iago', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 40 (2002): 59-82.

⁴¹ Father-son Oedipal melodramas are, of course, a staple of Hollywood cinema (see Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2005)), but are especially common in sport-themed films. *Field of Dreams* (1989) is probably the most famous case, while *Fear Strikes Out* (1957) is notable for its critical interrogation of paternal investment in filial sporting achievement. Hugo's enviously racist motivation is undoubtedly mitigated in the film's narrative logic by the emphasis on how, as actor Josh Hartnett put it, 'this kid is screwed up really, pretty bad' through 'loss', his 'missing a lot of love' from his father (interview on *O 2* disc special edition, Lions Gate, 2002). In the much cruder 2009 bare knuckle boxing film *Fighting* (2009), the white protagonist's climactic fight with his black rival is also directly motivated by jealousy of the latter's favouring by his former College coach father.

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