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**The Paradoxical Position of the White Rapper in Hip-
Hop Music: A Genre Fixated on Authenticity**

An Analysis of the Use of African-American English in the Music of
Eminem, Iggy Azalea, and Classified

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1 Introduction

I see so many people lost who really try to pretend
Am I just another White boy who has caught on to the trend?
When I take a step to the mic is hip-hop closer to the end?
Cause when I go to shows the majority have white skin
[...]
Where's my place in a music that's been taken by my race
Culturally appropriated by the white face?
And we don't want to admit that this is existing
So scared to acknowledge the benefits of our White privilege
[...]
So where does this leave me?
I feel like I pay dues, but I'll always be a white MC
I give everything I have when I write a rhyme
But that doesn't change the fact that this culture's not mine

These excerpts from “White Privilege” (from the album “The Language of my World” of 2005), a song by White American rapper Macklemore, capture the essence of my dissertation. Macklemore, like many other White rappers, questions his position in the musical genre of hip-hop, which is commonly perceived to be a typically African-American cultural expression. Many scholars today would argue that because of its roots, only African Americans can deliver hip-hop music in a way that does the genre justice. For many, music produced by African-American rappers has that extra edge and exclusive authentic appeal. Where does that leave the White rapper? Are works produced by him or her inevitably inauthentic? Moreover, how does a White rapper engage in a genre that regularly expresses anti-White sentiment? Also, is a White rapper guilty of cultural appropriation when he or she makes hip-hop music, as is suggested by Macklemore in his song? Many hip-hop scholars seem very anxious about a pattern of White appropriation of Black music, which started with jazz and soul, repeating itself with hip-hop. Although there already exists a lot of secondary material on this subject, my examination will help to provide answers to these questions like these by also

exposing the paradoxical nature of hip-hop. Many scholars seem reluctant to also utter criticism hip-hop culture, which is what this work will try to respectfully engage in. At the end of this work, conclusions will be made which surpass the statement that White rappers are found to be inauthentic, by giving an explanation as to *why* that might be.

A lot of members of the hip-hop community – fans, artists, scholars – do not seem to be very eager to accept outsiders who may share similar experiences and tastes but who do not have African-American ethnicity. Whereas race is usually thought of as an intrinsic trait, “ethnicity” rather groups people of similar linkage together, “whose social identity was formed by influences from outside” (Gumperz 1982: 5). Rampton (2005: 285) perceives ethnicity as a combination of common origin, culture and language. Because of this, members of an ethnic group actively self-identify with others of the in-group and against outsiders. In this context, people with a darker complexion share experiences of discrimination that White outsiders have not been through. Therefore, one could argue that only people with African ethnicity can be considered as members of the African-American experience. This makes it difficult for non-African Americans to partake in African-American music without having to account for it. Also for Whites, hip-hop has the potential to be a medium for creativity and emotional expressivity. Unfortunately for these performers, hip-hop seems to be almost antagonistic “if not antithetical” (Catanese 2011: 33) towards White culture. Because of this, three “White” Anglophone rap artists were chosen to investigate their stance on this complex politically loaded and emotionally charged topic.

My dissertation entails theoretical information (Part I) and a linguistic analysis (Part II). The production of African-American English will be considered as an indication of linguistic appropriation by respectively Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Classified. Each of these artists their commercial success, recognition and received criticism will be linked to their linguistic behavior. Their speech will be compared to African-American rapper J. Cole, an “insider” of the culture, in order to gain insight in hip-hop’s language. The structure of my work is as follows: first of all, chapter 2 will provide the necessary information one needs to contextualize hip-hop and rap music. It will elaborate on the origins, the differences between hip-hop and rap, the high-estimated value of authenticity, and the link to African-American culture. After this, the cultural appropriation-debate will be summarized in chapter 3. This will include a

lengthy discussion of this phenomenon's dynamics, different manifestations, and its problematized relationship to authenticity. These two first chapters will give a firm understanding of the complicated relationship between the White rapper and hip-hop. Then, chapter 4 will deal explicitly with issues of authenticity and strategies to counter the importance of having African-American ethnicity as a rapper. After this theoretical framework, part II introduces my linguistic research. Comprised of one chapter (5), this part will explain my method and interpretation of the works of the three aforementioned White rappers. Their language, lyrics, and representation of their persona will form the basis of my interpretations. Due to a fixed maximum length of this dissertation, there will be no examination of non-verbal aspects that involve the body, although this would definitely provide the interested reader with new perspectives.

Finally, one could offer critique on the view that "hip hop is and always will be a culture of the African-American minority" (Bozza 2003: 153). Although Bozza acknowledges hip-hop's international profile in his work, one could say that his general view of hip-hop as an exclusively African-American expression could fall "into the trap of denying cultural agency to others" who engage in it (Mitchell and Pennycook 2009: 29). Without any intent of minimalizing the originality and intellectual value that local varieties of hip-hop can embody, this dissertation will nevertheless consider African-American hip-hop to be the "mother culture" (Alim 2009: 9), from which these three White rappers in specific have taken inspiration. The focus will be on the dialogue between these rappers and African-American hip-hop. Other forms and styles of rap that can be found in for example countries in Africa will not be included for the purpose of this dissertation.

2 Introduction to Hip-hop

In this introductory chapter, the key concepts of hip-hop will be explained. In the first part (2.1), the difference between “rap music” and “hip-hop” will be elaborated upon. It will become clear what is meant by “hip-hop culture” and how the value of authenticity plays such an important role in its music. The goal of this part and chapter in general is to provide a crucial framework of knowledge that is dense with theoretical terms and concepts. These are needed to contextualize my research and to obtain a deeper understanding of hip-hop as a cultural phenomenon. In part 2.1.1, hip-hop will be explained as a culture, after which rap as a musical constituent will be elaborated upon in 2.1.2. After this, 2.1.3 will give a critical reflection on the subject. In the appendix (a), illustrations of what hip-hop scholars like Marcyliena Morgan (2009) consider to be “real” rap will be elucidated in the shape of rap lyric excerpts. These will vary from examples of rap that embodies the hip-hop culture to rap that opens up the African-American perspective and challenges dominant discourse in a more broad political way.

2.1 Hip-hop Culture Versus Rap Music

“Rap is part of hip-hop, hip-hop is not part of rap. People have to understand that. We put the term on it, the music “hip-hop”, but now when you say “hip-hop”, people just think, “Oh, you’re talking about a rap record” (Edwards 2015: 18). This quote by Afrika Bambaataa, who is considered the “Godfather of Hip-hop”, represents a fraction of a fully-fledged “rap vs. hip-hop” debate. From Bambaataa’s perspective, “hip-hop music” includes more than just rap. There are plenty of instrumental songs void of rap that are considered to be hip-hop music. Rap music that is also referred to as hip-hop music is rap that embodies the values of the hip-hop culture. In the same way, a hip-hopper is most often a rapper, but a rapper is only accepted as a hip-hopper when he or she is a member of the hip-hop culture - which comes with limitations for the White rapper. Famous hip-hop artist and rapper KRS-One summarized this entire debate quite simply as “rap is something you do, Hip-hop is something you live” (Krimms 2000). What rap and hip-hop specifically stand for and why KRS-One has just been introduced as a hip-

hop artist as well as a rapper, will become clear after the “rap versus hip-hop” battle will be fought out in the following two parts.

2.1.1 Hip-hop

Hip-hop and “rap” stand for two different principles. Hip-hop, on the one hand, marks a culture of which rapping is the musical constituent. The other elements of hip-hop are DJ-ing, breakdancing or “b-boying”, and graffiti art (Osumare 2007: 12). In video clips, the four of them can appear together. In general, rap is most prominent in contemporary popular culture and therefore mistaken to represent the complete picture of hip-hop. Interpreting hip-hop as a culture generates the possibility of “living” it as a lifestyle that comes with appropriate urban-style clothing, dialect and attitude. Because of the strong link to African Americans, the dialect spoken in hip-hop culture is African-American English (further on referred to as AAE). As I discussed in my bachelor paper¹, the use of this variety in itself conveys an attitude of resistance towards the hegemonic White American society. AAE does not accommodate to the norm, in the same way a lot of its speakers refuse to give in to the cultural and linguistic expectations of this society.

The culture developed itself in the 1970s in the Bronx, New York. The term “hip-hop” was first used in the song “Rapper’s Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang, after which it was used routinely for the new lifestyle and music genre. To understand the origins of hip-hop, one must go back in time to the beginning of the 20th century. In this time, the violence between Whites and African Americans – especially of Whites towards African Americans - in the South increased. African Americans suffered from lynching practices of White Americans who were almost never prosecuted for these actions. As a response to this, self-defense and relocation were proposed by African-American newspaper owners Thomas T. Fortune and Robert Abott and journalist Ida Bell Wells-Barnett. Consequently, over a time span of 60 years, about six and a half million African Americans moved from the South to the North. This historical event is also referred to as “The Great Migration” (Aberjhani and West 2003: 391) and marks African Americans’ rejection of “a system of justice that clearly did not view whites murdering blacks as a crime” (233) that was in place in the South. On top of this, The

¹ “The Use of African-American English in Hip-hop music, Asserting an Identity of Resistance” (2014)

North offered job opportunities to African-American men. This was partly because of the first World War, which halted European immigration work force and sent thousands of American men away to fight (Morgan 2002: 22). This particular history caused a high density of African Americans to populate Northern cities like New York, which created a “public black sphere” (Osumare 2007: 96). This notion is based on Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the bourgeois “public sphere”, which he describes as when a “sphere of private people come together as a public” who use the “public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves” (Pough 2004: 17). In the 1990s, a group of African-American scholars called themselves The Black Public Sphere Collective and added to Habermas’s definition “vernacular practices such as street talk, new music, radio shows, and church voices” (17). In this kind of context, stimulated by the atmosphere of a Black public sphere, hip-hop as a cultural movement was encouraged to grow.

Hip-hop culture revolves around some core values. These are authenticity, knowledge of African-American culture and history, respect, and loyalty. To be authentic is of key importance in hip-hop. Rappers feel the need to represent their community. When they perform, they take on “the mantle from the past in the present moment” (Osumare 2007: 27). This mantle could represent the generations of African Americans who fought for civil rights. Black activism was part of early hip-hop and lingers on today. Rappers wish to represent African-American culture and all the experiences it entails. A lot of artists rap in first person, which makes their stories appear more realistic and leaves no room for “fake representation” (Cobb 2007: 112). Autobiography supports the notion that “the hip hop performer must symbolically be collapsed into the artist” (Hess 2007: 24), which means that preferably, the rapper’s stories are personal. Very often one can hear claims of rappers being the ‘realest’ (sic) while calling others out for being fake. References to ‘rough’ cities or neighborhoods are tokens of authenticity that help to establish a ghetto identity for the rapper (Osumare 2007: 167). Hip-hop’s fixation on authenticity is read by Kembrew McLeod as a “strategy to preserve the culture as it had existed outside the mainstream” (Hess 2007: 23). In line with Young’s opinion, hip-hop produced by African-American artists is considered to be inherently authentic. On the level of provenance authenticity – explained further in 3.4.1- , this statement is true. Arguably, every African-American

artist is a member of the African-American experience in which hip-hop developed. On the other hand, personal authenticity is not a certainty for the African-American rapper either. It does not suffice to belong to the in-group to be “real”. Authenticity is a performative dimension of hip-hop, in other words, it needs to be enacted. African-American rappers have to do their best to maintain their personal authenticity by constantly referring to it and giving proof of it. For example, rapper Kendrick Lamar safeguards his authenticity by speaking out in “Good Kid, m.A.A.d City” (2012) about police violence and racism, by describing and paying homage to the rough streets of his hometown Compton and its gangs (Good Kid), by sympathizing with the lower classes like “the hood rich, the broke niggas” (Compton), by referring to African-American civil rights activist Martin Luther King (Backseat Freestyle), and so on. Furthermore, he uses an extensive array of typical features of AAE. The use of this variety can add to a rapper’s authenticity and representational character of a certain neighborhood. One could argue that authenticity is important for a lot of other genres as well, but unique for hip-hop is the incorporation of “real talk” and AAE in the “product” itself (Jeffries 2011: 120). This implies that these songs’ authenticity is a very visible element in the music. A lot of raps work with authenticity as a theme that is explicitly mentioned. Another strategy often employed to ensure personal authenticity and show dedication to the hip-hop genre is the mentioning of other artists and prominent African-American figures. Hip-hop lyrics are known to be dense with intertextual references which only the up-to-date aficionados with knowledge of hip-hop history can understand. Exemplified again by Kendrick Lamar, he refers to and makes jokes about r&b-singers Ciara, Usher and Adina Howard, hip-hop formation NWA, rappers Uncle Luke, Jeezy, E-40 and The Game, African-American actress Halle Berry, basketball players Arron Afflalo and Michael Jordan and many more, all within the same album.

For a lot of rappers, ‘keepin’ it real’ is difficult once they become mainstream popular and financially successful. Stories of everyday struggle, which a great part of their fan base can usually identify with, become only addressed in a reminiscent way anymore. It happens that newly successful rappers lose touch with the ‘man/woman in the street’. They can be seen throwing money in the air, wearing huge gold chains,

showing off their grill², and so on. Rapping about having a lot of money is a popular theme in songs of rappers like Lil' Wayne, Drake, Jay-Z and Dr. Dre. Popular hip-hop artists can lose their personal authenticity in this way by being a "sell-out"³ and by behaving superficially. This can cause fans to lose interest in these specific artists. Instead, fans will start looking for authentic underground hip-hop elsewhere. The genre should not occupy itself with the rich and the famous. Quite the opposite, real hip-hop should draw attention to 'the complex dimensions of ghetto life ignored by many Americans' (Dyson 1996: 184), shedding light on "otherwise invisible lives" (Cobb 2007: 196) and exchanging true information (Ice-T 1994: 98). At its best, it stimulates young men and women to educate themselves, to get together and form opinions to counter the hegemonic society in a creative and challenging way. Hip-hop can be credited for stimulating many African-American children to rise from illiteracy and develop their reading and writing skills. Furthermore, this movement has encouraged African Americans to take part in public and political life. Not in the sense that listening to rap makes one more politically committed. Hip-hop music in itself does not have the transformative power that is obtained via "mobilization, organization building and political, economic and social struggle" (Lamont 1999: 336). To attribute world-changing characteristics to this music genre would be too simple. It can however be used by initiators as a means to persuade and inspire people. An example of this was the Hip-Hop Team Vote initiative, which encouraged young people to vote during the American electoral politics of 2008 (Osumare 2007: 7), which led to Barack Obama's election as the first African-American president in American history. The informative element is often brought up by rappers and fans of the genre. "The streets is where young bloods get their education. [...] the teacher would test our vocabulary each week, but we knew the vocabulary we needed. They'd give us arithmetic to exercise our minds. Hell, we exercised our minds by playing the dozens⁴." (Kochman 1972: 205). As the quote shows, hip-hop is often elevated to the level of education. This is accompanied by a general disdain for conventional White institutions like school.

² Reported by the Urban Dictionary - which is not an academic tough reliable source for street knowledge, a grill is a "gold/diamond plate that is molded for your teeth. It is decorated with diamonds and/or gold". It is a very luxurious accessory that is found predominantly with rich hip-hoppers.

³ A sell-out is an artist who makes music for the sole purpose of making money.

⁴ To play the dozens is a practice within hip-hop and rap in which two contesters try to overpower each other by means of insulting each other in creative ways.

Rappers try to display knowledge like teachers, and some would even see their work as a replacement for traditional education. In “Hood Mentality”, Ice-T says: “Fuck school nigga, they ain’t trying to educate me / all they give a fuck is what I memorized lately”. Ironically enough, academic hip-hop courses are now given at Stanford University, San Francisco State University, UCLA, NYU, and The Bowling Green State University in Ohio (Osumare 2007: 5).

Rap, interpreted as hip-hop music, has been defined by Ron Eyerman (2001: 219) as a “form of counter-memory, where symbolic expressions of resistance, as well as ideals of emancipation, are maintained and transmitted”. The emancipation that Eyerman talks about in the citation is presumably that of the African-American people in general. In the context of hip-hop, one can say that the emancipated group is narrowed down to mostly African-American men. Rap has been a male-dominated music scene from the start. Female rappers are a minority and so far, internationally successful ones remain few in number. Male rappers will usually present themselves as heterosexual, masculine and tough. Russell Potter (1995: 100) elucidates that these characteristics – not just in the context of hip-hop music – have developed as a result of re-claiming manhood in the post-slavery society. Because of White power, African-American women were taken from their families and abused as sex slaves. As a consequence of this traumatic past, Rappers often reclaim these women through their lyrics, creating a discourse of possession in relation to their ‘ho’s’ and ‘bitches’. This also implies that there is no room for homosexuality in the assertion of a resistant African-American identity. This would hinder the “revolutionary reclamation of the hetero manhood” (99) and in general, “gayness is seen by some African Americans as a second-order identity, layered on top of middle- or upper class status people”. It is no secret that misogyny and homophobia remain the Achilles heel of hip-hop music, particularly within “gangsta rap”. This is a subgenre of rap that started at the West Coast and is characterized by a macho attitude and explicit lyrics. The themes often revolve around violence, drugs, and being a gangster. More background information on gangsta rap is provided in the appendix (b). The genre is notorious for its general low estimation of women and homosexuals. This draws attention to a first paradox within hip-hop music. As Pough (2004: 19) states: “while some rappers claim to be the new voice for the marginalized group of Black youth they claim to represent, they oppress and

marginalize women and homosexuals [...] Even though Hip-Hop culture suffers state oppression, it can and it does in certain instances act as an oppressor”. This echoes the thoughts of philosopher Simone Weil, who argued that “when the weak get together, they mimic the actions of the formerly powerful” (Elam and Jackson 2005: 84). In his work called “Between God and Gangsta Rap” (1996: 186), Dyson stresses that slurs against homosexuals and women did not arise from rap music out of the blue. He feels that one cannot “continue to blame gangsta rap for ills that existed long before hip-hop uttered its first syllable”. In addition to this, John Hagedorn and Mike Davis (2008: 104-105) point to the true-to-life storytelling aspect of hip-hop music. The goal is to paint credible pictures of life in impoverished neighborhoods. Misogyny is an “all-too-real aspect of life on the streets” and therefore pops up regularly in rap’s lyrics. Hagedorn and Davis do not elaborate on this any further, which can give the impression of them turning a blind eye to the rather intolerant side of rap music, a side that hip-hop scholars are sometimes happy to ignore.

To conclude, one can say that hip-hop as a culture is clearly centered around African Americans (Cutler 2014: 4). As Tricia Rose said, it is a: “black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America” (Lamont 1999: 322), despite its global success. The main reason for this is the origins of hip-hop music that trace its roots back to Africa. Part of the Africanist aesthetic is for example talk-singing, present in the oral traditions. Also tonal semantics⁵, mimicry, punning and metaphorical language are said to be typical of this aesthetic. Metaphors were primarily needed by African-diasporic peoples⁶ to “simultaneously conceal and reveal themselves in alien, if not hostile, New World environments” (Osumare 2007: 12). From Jamaican culture, “toasting”, the practice of chanting words over a rhythm to get the audience involved, has influenced the rapper’s performance. Therefore, hip-hop is more of a hybrid culture (Hagedorn and Davis 2008: 96) (Lütke 2008: 15) (Osumare 2007: 26) than an essentially and purely African-American one.

⁵ Tonal semantics refers to “the use of voice rhythm and vocal inflection to convey meaning in black communication” (Smitherman 1977: 134).

⁶ The afro-diasporic cultures referred to are Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Barbados and Cuba. Together with North-American Blacks they are considered as ‘the Black Atlantic’ (Osumare 2007: 30). The Caribbean immigrants in New York in the 1970s are perceived to have influenced the early stages of hip-hop music significantly.

2.1.2 Rap

Rap as a musical form, on the other hand, is characterized by a dominance of percussion and “offbeat phrasing of melodic accents” (Osumare 2007: 45) while rhyming. The form is closer to talking than singing. There exist a lot of misconceptions of the complexity of this musical expression. At worst, rap music has been described as “an ugly noise created by unsophisticated musicians” (Krimms 2000). This interpretation fails to acknowledge that “rapping is a skill that requires immense verbal and mental dexterity” (Pennycook 2007: 10). Because rappers usually have a lot to say in their songs, their lyrics take up all of the attention. Therefore, the music and the beats are kept more simple, clean and repetitive. The unjust notion of rappers as unsophisticated musicians stems from the conservative Western assumption that music revolves around the ability to play an instrument. For rap music, a style that originally grew as a “rose out of the concrete”⁷ of the streets in New York, one could argue that an MC⁸’s voice was as easy and free instrument one could make use of⁹. The MC’s rhyming style, texture, timbre and semantic topics (Krimms 2000) are the formal requirements that should be measured. On top of that, the metaphors, the puns, and the references taken from literally any field of knowledge are used to make an audience go crazy. Needless to say, inventing clever lyrics on the spot, a practice called “freestyling”, poses a challenge even for the more talented rap artists.

Other language practices employed by rappers are braggadocio, signifying and playing the dozens. First of all, braggadocio or bravado stands for the rapper’s assertion of his or her superb and exaggerated “macho” abilities (Richardson 2006: 11). As reported by Edouard De Prez (2014), braggadocio primarily revolves around themes of

⁷ “The Rose That Grew From Concrete” is a poem by the famous rap artist Tupac Shakur. Volumes of scholarly work have been written about him since he was shot in his car in 1996. He is regarded very highly in hip-hop music and in 2003, Harvard University even held a conference that was titled: “Tupac Shakur and the search for a modern folk hero” (Osumare 2007: 5).

² An “MC” stands for “Master of Ceremonies” and is an older term for “rapper”. An MC works the crowd and performs with a lot of skill. A lot of artists also link the word MC with a more positive connotation than the term rapper. According to artists as KRS-One, MC Lyte and Chuck D – who presumably all consider themselves to be MC’s – rappers are more “commercially focused and less skillful, while MCs are more genuine, authentic, and proficient” (Edwards 2015: 7).

⁹ On top of this, classical instruments were not in fashion at the time, according to Edwards (2015: 42-44). Via quotes of important rap artists, he reports that the main reason for rappers to leave the guitars, drums – etc – to the side is because it was not deemed cool compared to the loud music booming from a speaker box. This kind of DJ-equipment was sometimes more expensive than instruments.

coolness - in a materialistic and attitudinal sense - authenticity and violence. It can also manifest itself on a meta-level, when rappers boast about how good and creatively they can brag about themselves. An example of this braggadocio is this: "Forget a Chorus/ My metaphors are so complicated, it takes six minutes to get applause /and by the time you all catch on, I'mma end your career and walk away with the whole floor so you have nothin' to fall back on!", sung by Eminem in "Nuttin' To Do". Secondly, signifying is calling somebody out, usually in the shape of rhymes. It is directed personally towards someone and is meant jokingly. It can also be understood as a way of expressing your feelings and exchanging tales in a gripping way. This practice is different from playing the dozens, which takes funny wordplay to the level of the offensive and insulting. "...what you try to do is totally destroy somebody else with words. It's that whole competition game again, fighting each other. There'd be sometimes forty or fifty dudes standing around and the winner was determined by the way they responded to what was said" (Kochman 1972: 205-206). If one plays the dozens, one is "shit talkin'" to an opponent. Rapper Ice T explained this in his book "The Ice Opinion" (1994), in which he dedicated an entire chapter to "Rap: The Art of Shit Talkin'". A beloved trope within this practice are "Yo Momma" jokes that are meant to humiliate and infuriate the other. From 2006 until 2007, there was even a television show on MTV called "Yo Momma", where verbal battles were fought using insulting references to each other's mothers.

For youths all around the world, rap has provided them with a frame in which they can critically analyze the world and voice opinions (Morgan 2009: 6). The music is often considered as an exchange of true information and insider knowledge that sometimes can take the shape of social protest. The three artists selected for this dissertation provide only a glimpse of how rap has gone global over the years. The genre has fascinated very differing groups of people from all ages, from Germany to Japan, Senegal to Haiti, and so on. Osumare (2007: 15) explains the success of rap due to the existence of "connective marginalities". This implies that a mix of culture, class differences, youth rebellion and oppression suffice for rap music to thrive anywhere. Therefore, a lot of local rap will develop itself in a unique and distinct way, moving away from its African-American roots. Different urban cultures can bring forth their own variety of rap; a lot of them will probably not feel pressured to live by America's

rap standards, or to account for their style in any way. It is important to remember that not every non-African-American rapper feels the need to live up to a certain expectation of how to rap. Some foreign rappers do not feel indebted to the original hip-hop culture, and do not care about its rules.

2.1.3 A Matter of Semantics?

A lot of hip-hop scholars value the distinction between rap as music and hip-hop as a culture as it has been presented so far. However, in reality, rap is called hip-hop, rappers are called hip-hop artists without consideration of this distinction and thus lexical lines tend to become blurred or even irrelevant in popular music discourse. Some decide to write Hip-hop capitalized, others use small letters in the same way “jazz” or “blues” are written. One could wonder if the whole “rap vs. hip-hop” theory has become detached from reality, since for example artists and radio presenters constantly mix the terms up themselves. For what follows in this dissertation, the nuance will turn out to be valuable nonetheless. Hip-hop culture is linked very strongly to African-American culture and rapping is a music form that grew out of it. The aforementioned KRS-One is considered to be both a hip-hop artist and a rapper because on the one hand, his lyrics are often politically loaded, Afrocentric and critical of hip-hop culture on a meta-level. On the other hand, his style of performance allows him to be classified as a rapper.

As a practice within hip-hop, rap can possibly be abstracted from the culture and become accessible for individuals outside of African-American communities and even the U.S. in general. Therefore, the White artists examined in this dissertation can be acknowledged as rappers. In the discourse of hip-hop, rap can sometimes be attributed a negative connotation. When hip-hop aficionados and artists deem someone’s work to be mere “rap”, it is considered to have no grounding in hip-hop culture and often accused to have profit as its only objective. On the other hand, when rap accomplishes to represent the culture properly, it is called hip-hop (Edwards 2015: 19). This implies that White rappers can easily become excluded by some on the basis of them not belonging to African-American culture. Rap that is called hip-hop is often perceived as better and valued as more qualitative. This dissertation will respect the distinction but will not attribute any value judgement to either one of them.

3 Cultural Appropriation

In what follows next, “cultural appropriation” will be considered as a possibility to describe the actions of a White rapper when he or she takes part in an African-American musical tradition. “The White rapper” means to represent all White rappers participating in contemporary popular culture, including women. This helps to make general assumptions about this particular figure before individually analyzing Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Classified in chapter five.

In part 3.1, a definition and understanding of cultural appropriation as a sociological phenomenon will be given. Next, reflections on globalization as part of the dynamics behind cultural appropriation will be discussed in 3.2. Because the term “cultural appropriation” covers more than one kind of appropriation, 3.3 will deal with the different types, as they are reported by James O. Young (2010). Next, “style appropriation” in specific will be examined more closely in 3.3.1. This part also includes an application of style appropriation on other African-American musical traditions besides hip-hop. After this, the focus of the chapter will shift to possible issues of authenticity for the White rapper. This part is crucial in the context of hip-hop, which is quoted to be a culture with a “religion and ideology of authenticity” (Jeffries 2011: 117). More about the importance of authenticity in hip-hop music will be disclosed in part 3.4. James O. Young’s (2010) different levels of authenticity will be taken up to give a nuanced understanding of the White rapper’s potentially problematized link to this phenomenon in 3.4.1. In the next part (3.4.2) Kembrew McLeod’s empirical model of what the hip-hop community members perceive to be “real” and “fake” will be presented. Thereafter, the relationship between authenticity and aesthetics will be touched upon in part 3.4.3. Finally, a general conclusion in regards to cultural appropriation and the White rapper will be given in 3.5.

3.1 What Is Cultural Appropriation?

The topic of cultural appropriation is getting increasing attention in cultural studies, especially in cultural anthropology. The secondary material that was consulted for this

part belongs to these academic disciplines but could also be relevant in the context of law studies. Theoretically, one speaks of cultural appropriation when a member of a certain culture takes and uses intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts (Ziff and V. Rao 1997: 1) from another culture. Part 2.1.1 of the previous chapter has established what hip-hop culture stands for. In the introduction of this dissertation, it was briefly mentioned how Whites are often perceived as outsiders or “underdogs” in a culture that identifies itself as Black. Do White rappers engage in cultural appropriation? If one tends to agree with this, one affirms the idea that hip-hop is meant exclusively for African Americans. Moreover, this train of thought perceives cultures to be neatly sealed off from one another and ignores for example possible cultural overlaps or hybridization¹⁰. Young¹¹ (2010), Mahon¹² (2004), Hill¹³ (2011) and many more scholars take part in the discourse about White cultural appropriation of African-American music, fully convinced that this phenomenon encompasses the White rapper’s behavior. This chapter is designed to take into account yet remain critical of such claims and perform research on cultural appropriation in an objective way.

3.2 The Dynamics Behind Cultural Appropriation

Before examining this phenomenon up close, one should investigate what enabled it. Within cultural anthropology, globalization and its consequence of so-called ‘vanishing cultures’ are mentioned as having the most influence on this phenomenon (Hahn 2012: 19). Nowadays, it becomes harder to distinguish where one culture ends and where the other one starts. Cultural anthropologists would agree that cultures do not exist in a vacuum and cultural borrowing is not exceptional. Globalization can be perceived as partly responsible for turning cultural products into widespread commodities. Because

¹⁰ Hybridization is a process in which two or more cultures influence and help shape another cultural entity, the hybrid. The hybrid is a mix of characteristics from both of the original cultures together with features of its own (Stockhammer 2012: 133).

¹¹ James O. Young takes Eric Clapton as an example of White cultural appropriation. He puts it like this: “Eric Clapton takes the blues as something for his use. Clapton’s culture is not that in which the blues originated, so his appropriation is cultural appropriation” (5). In analogy to White rappers, Young would call their music cultural appropriation as well.

¹² Maureen Mahon talks about rock ‘n roll when addressing the topic of cultural appropriation, saying that in that context, “white appropriation of black sound and style was devastating to many of the music’s originators” (2004: 148).

¹³ Jane H. Hill illustrates symbolical appropriation (as opposed to material appropriation) as “the theft by White impresarios and musicians of musical styles and even specific compositions by African Americans” (2008).

of this, certain products become more easily available to members of different cultures. Within cultural anthropology, globalization and its homogenizing effects are usually perceived as having a negative influence on society. Hans P. Hahn (2012: 19) puts it like this: “New consumer goods create new and threatening dependencies, forcing the members of the local culture to abandon inherited values. The advent of global goods was equated with the end of traditional cultures”. This perception of globalization, connecting the phenomenon with inevitable losses for local communities, was advocated and investigated by Richard Salisbury in his work “From Stone to Steel” (1962). Salisbury, a botanist, claimed that the introduction of steel tools in New Guinea would lead to the deterioration of the inhabitants’ traditional knowledge and culture. However, the existence of local communities in New Guinea today has proven him wrong (Hahn 2012: 19). One could also go back in time even more and hold colonialism responsible for the fading boundaries between cultures. Colonial settings serve as an early example in which mutual influence and cultural appropriation have taken place. This extensive and interesting topic will not be expanded upon for the purpose of this chapter.

In addition to the long-held tradition of describing cultures as separate entities, anthropologists now also examine the transformative effects of globalization on smaller communities. One goal of this dissertation is to find out where the White rapper positions his- or herself on a linguistic level. Does he or she take over the language of the globalized African-American hip-hop? Or do local elements shine through? This will become clear after an in-depth analysis of three White rappers’ lyrics on a linguistic and lexical level, which will be provided in the sixth chapter. So far, the dynamics of globalization have given the impression that today, cultures may not differ that distinctly anymore. This could serve as a first argument against the validity of White cultural appropriation. On the other hand, as a response to globalization, local cultures could also assume a more distinct character to resist assimilation. Before jumping to conclusions, the different types of cultural appropriation should be addressed.

3.3 Types Of Cultural Appropriation

If one holds on to the Black/White-distinction so many scholars perceive as valid, this would be the way to proceed: Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Classified all take hip-hop as a musical expression for their own use. Since they are all White and only Eminem is American, they do not belong to the culture in which hip-hop originated. As a consequence, they appropriate. To phrase this statement in a more nuanced way, different types of appropriation can be distinguished. The categories that are presented next are the ones suggested by James O. Young in his work “Cultural Appropriation and The Arts” (2010). Towards the end, it will become clear how Young positions the White rapper in regards to appropriation, which will be interpreted in the context of hip-hop for the purpose of this work. It should be stressed again that the following draft of appropriations remains in the line of thought that non-African Americans – here: people with Caucasian ethnicity, “Whites” – and African Americans belong to different cultures that have little in common. Because of the body of work concerning the distinctiveness, uniqueness and independence of African-American culture, which is largely positioned in contrast to White American culture, an outsider of both of these cultures easily believes that these two indeed constitute two separate worlds. Four relevant types of appropriation are outlined next.

To start with, *object appropriation* is the most obvious form of “taking from another culture”. It occurs when a tangible work of art is moved to another culture. In this sense, a lot of museums participate in object appropriation. If one travels to Peru and buys an authentic piece of art to bring home to Europe, this could also be called object appropriation. At worst, this kind of appropriation could harm the indigenous culture when objects would be stolen by outsiders.

Secondly, intangible items can be appropriated as well. One speaks of *content appropriation* when stories, ideas or general knowledge from one culture becomes reused somewhere else (Young 2010: 6). The typical Aztec print on contemporary fashion items is an example of content appropriation. It is up for discussion if a culture can really “own” something that is intangible. Young himself believes that a group is only entitled to concrete items of cultural property (51). It seems that appropriating intangible items marks an instance in which one has to reflect on ethics rather than legislation. If an audience is uncomfortable with intangible content appropriation, the artist will be less successful and maybe change his or her strategy as a result.

A third form of appropriation is *style appropriation*, when someone produces works with the same stylistic qualities as works belonging to a different culture. As is the case for content appropriation, style appropriation cannot be legally confined. A bad stylistic appropriation by outsiders can lead to misrepresentation, which renders a wrong image of the indigenous culture and causes harm by enforcing stereotypes. A part of style appropriation is *linguistic appropriation*, when one uses the same speech pattern or language of the initiators of the particular style one is trying to appropriate. By using AAE, the White rapper engages in a language tradition a lot of African Americans - rappers in specific - share. With linguistic appropriation, the White rapper expresses affinity for African-American culture on the one hand and enhances proximity to its members on the other. If the White rapper would overuse features of AAE or use it wrongly, it could reinforce prejudice¹⁴ towards the variety for people who take the appropriator's account to be representative. More implications of White rappers' linguistic appropriation will become clear in the individual analysis of Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Classified later on.

Finally, *subject appropriation* does not have to do with the culturally-located artistic product but with instead with the culture's members. This is also called voice appropriation, "when outsiders represent the lives of insiders in the first person" (7). It is especially in literature that subject or voice appropriation takes place today. Any author who writes a story in the first person about a different culture engages in this kind of appropriation. Subject appropriation is to some extent similar to "passing¹⁵", a theme in literature that is discussed in a chapter that was moved to the appendix (c). This was done mainly because despite its interesting historical narrative it was not applicable on the White rappers of this dissertation. An example of subject appropriation is talked about in another work of James O. Young called "The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation" (2012). Young mentions Tony Hillerman, a White American author, who often situates his novels in a Native American setting. The depiction of minorities by a member of the majority culture is quite controversial. Very often, members of a minority group – in this case Native Americans - have fewer chances to

¹⁴ AAE is an often stigmatized variety of English. Some people think of it as unintelligent and as an "imperfectly learned approximation to real English" (Filmore 1997)

¹⁵ Passing stands for "the ability to be taken for a member of a social category other than one's own" (Bucholtz 1995: 351).

profit from the economic system of the majority group – here: White Americans. Besides not being able to enjoy the financial benefits of their culture once it becomes appropriated, misrepresentation causes even greater harm to a minority culture. Outsiders who represent a different culture do not have the same experiences of insiders, which can lead to a wrong and inauthentic appropriation of a culture. As a response to problems of subject appropriation specifically concerning Native American culture, the U.S. government drafted the Indian Arts and Crafts Act in 1990. This stated that products were not allowed to be marketed as “Native American” unless they were legitimately produced by a Native American (as informed by the website of the U.S. Department of Interior). This Act prohibited members of the majority culture to exploit Native American cultural artifacts. Hillerman’s objective probably was not to ridicule the Native American community of the Navajo, but subject appropriation of this sort has happened in the past. The best example of condescending appropriation were the minstrel shows of the 19th century. In these shows, White actors wore blackface make-up and behaved like caricatures of African Americans. Their culture and language were misrepresented and turned into a joke (Potter 1995: 58).

If one agrees with cultural appropriation being the case for the White rapper, this presentation of various appropriations was necessary to come to a conceptually-grounded discussion in relation to hip-hop. Out of all four, style appropriation with a possibility of linguistic appropriation is suggested as most fitting. As musicians, White rappers, who promote their product as hip-hop, are indebted to an existing musical tradition. This means they take over stylistic elements that are typical for hip-hop music. Style appropriation in this sense seems to be rather inevitable. I would argue that belonging to a certain genre even dictates engaging in style appropriation. How else can an artist get acknowledged as a rapper if he or she does not perform in this style? The other types of appropriation seem to affect the White rapper less. He or she does not take concrete objects from the African-American culture. To a certain extent, the White rapper can engage in content appropriation by reproducing ideas typical for hip-hop. It is possible that he or she feels inspired by other hip-hop performers and by the aesthetic of the genre in general, but normally there is no literal imitation. Instead, most artists create new songs and produce new content – unless in the case of covers. Lastly, subject appropriation or passing would not work out for the White rapper. If he or she

would pretend to be African American, one live performance would likely suffice for him or her to become exposed. This kind of appropriation has more chances of success in literature. Therefore, these other kinds of appropriation will not be taken up to describe the cross-over behavior of the White rapper. Instead, the focus of the next parts will shift first to style appropriation throughout last century, which was chosen as most fitted to describe the White rapper's actions. The opinions of strong opponents as well as reflections by scholars such as myself are taken into account to discuss the consequences of this type of appropriation

3.3.1 Style Appropriation of African-American Music

White stylistic appropriation of Black musical expressions goes back to the early 20th century, when Whites like Benny Goodman appropriated the African-American music style of jazz. Another example is the appropriation of rhythm and blues - "R&B" - into the White-dominated "rock 'n roll", which made Elvis Presley famous. Furthermore, African-American "soul" is also considered to have been appropriated to White disco in the 60s and 70s (Ziff & V. Rao 1997: 44-45). According to Amiri Baraka, who is an African-American writer and poet, "members of mainstream American culture have stolen from African Americans", which he calls the "Great Music Robbery" (Young 2010: 20). Baraka refers mostly to the African-American music styles of blues and jazz, appropriated respectively by for example Eric Clapton and Bix Beiderbecke. It is clear that for Baraka, in contrast to Young's opinion, intangible objects such as musical traditions are indeed property that belongs to the members of a certain culture. Theodore Gracyk (2001) writes that Baraka's statements

can be read as a proposal that appropriation of African and African American music undermines the autonomy of black culture. In Baraka's words, "after each new wave of black innovation... there was a commercial co-optation of the original music and an attempt to replace it with corporate dilution. [...] it is the harsher accusation that appropriation contributes to cultural genocide, threatening the very existence of African American culture (109).

One could respond to the harsh accusation of “cultural genocide” by giving a number of arguments against it. First, the examples already given above prove that African-American music styles really have been appropriated numerous times, but this has not stopped this culture from thriving and creating new traditions. In a way, it also denies the potential and cultural merit that hybrid musical expressions can have. As already mentioned in 2.1.1, hip-hop is in fact a hybrid of for example West-African, Afro-Brazilian¹⁶, Jamaican and African-American celebrations. Baraka’s other concerns are these:

when the acoustic patterns of African American music permeate the dominant white culture and become part of that culture, those sounds also come to embody the values and ideas of the dominant culture. African Americans constitute a distinct American subculture, and most do not embrace the ideas and values projected into the music by the dominant culture. So the music will no longer embody the ideas and the values of the black community (110).

This opinion, articulated by Gracyk but based on Baraka’s rather purist vision, juxtaposes African-American culture to White mainstream American culture and elaborates on the premise that every African-American artist automatically represents the ideas and values of the African-American community in his or her work. This does not have to be true. African-American rappers can mention money and talk about the lifestyles they live thanks to capitalism. They can brag about having “bitches” and can talk about poor people in a condescending way. Not every African-American rapper will act morally “authentic”. Important to remember is that Baraka talks about jazz and its White counterpart swing. His ideas could be taken out of their context and considered to be valid for White appropriation of contemporary hip-hop as well. But Baraka’s arguments seem to fall short when making the comparison. Since the 1920s and 30s, the heydays of jazz and White appropriation, boundaries between cultures have faded. Today, it has been roughly 60 years since the dissolution of the segregation laws.

¹⁶ Hagedorn and Davis (2008: 96) name the martial arts dance “capoeira” as an example of Afro-Brazilian influence.

In the early 20th century, White appropriation of Black musical expressions was stimulated by segregation. Each race went to venues that were reserved for them, where members of their own race performed. In the 21st century, one has more opportunities. People with different cultural backgrounds come into contact with each other and cross-fertilization between cultures happens as a result of this. Therefore, a wish for a complete segregation of cultures – as advocated for by Baraka - is not tenable and does not fit with the idea of the United States being a multicultural “melting pot”.

These statements do not mean to minimize the effects cultural appropriation can have. One cannot deny that this practice has the potential to cause harm to minority cultures. It remains questionable if today, 40 years after hip-hop’s “birth”, African-American culture is still as marginalized as it used to be and if an equalization of White and mainstream and African American and subculture still counts today. However, one can certainly not ignore the anxiety so many artists, writers and scholars share with regard to White appropriation. Some fear that when Whites appropriate Black music styles, it inevitably leads to the demise of that style. Armond White, an African-American film and music critic, shares Baraka’s views: “White appropriation attempts to erase the culture it plunders – a metaphor for the submission that dominant groups will upon others” (White 2003: 548). In the 20th century, White appropriation of African-American music could indeed be classified as “cultural plundering”. During the 1930s, “session opportunities for Black band musicians were severely limited” (Ziff & V. Rao 1997: 40) and White artists became rich at the expense of African Americans and their creative ideas. In this light, White has a point. However, these are not the conditions in which the African-American hip-hop artist finds him- or herself today. Major record labels, such as Bad Boy- and Death Row Records, and Roc Nation are governed by African-American hip-hop artists. Radio stations like Hot 97, Power 105 fm, Real 92.3, and so on devote themselves to hip-hop, along with magazines like Hype, Juice, Respect and TV-shows such as Empire, Drop the Beat and Rap City.

In conclusion, one could say that style appropriation does not steal tangible things nor does it prohibit other minority artists from producing art. The White rapper does not cause any African-American to cease rapping. He or she does not steal their music nor take away their audience. Hip-hop aficionados are able to like more than one artist and to buy more than one CD. However, The White rapper can fail in representing the hip-

hop style credibly. Bad artists can give foolish performances and give the genre a bad name for a bigger mainstream audience. But there exist untalented African-American hip-hoppers too, so this last argument is easily invalidated. Amiri Baraka and Armond White's condemning of cultural appropriation for undermining an entire culture does not seem reasonable. Moreover, it underestimates the relentlessness of the dynamic and fruitful culture that is African-American.

Prohibiting cultural appropriation goes against the artist's freedom of expression. More importantly, it would imply that artistic works only hold value when they are produced by insiders of a culture. "Are we thereby doomed to creative projects that cannot extend beyond the realm of autobiography?" (Ziff & V. Rao 1997: 17) is a question one can then rightfully ask oneself. Works produced by members of the in-group are authentic in ways the works of outsiders are not. This does not have to mean that outsiders cannot make something valuable or aesthetically successful. These ideas will be addressed in the next part of this chapter (3.4).

At the end of his book (2010), Young decides that "more and better subject appropriation would also contribute to understanding between cultures" and states that "the world needs more appropriation, not less" (Young 2010: 157). However, these quotations could be interpreted as being quite naïve and too praising. In the sphere of entertainment, cultural appropriation does not by itself lead to more tolerance between cultures. Whites "may absorb the aesthetic dimensions of Black culture, this is neither coupled with, nor does it lead to, an embrace of Black culture at the human level" (Ziff & V. Rao 1997: 21). Perry Hall adds to this that "white America seems to love the melody and rhythm of Black folks' souls while rejecting their despised Black faces" (31). White appropriation of African-American musical traditions is more than one century old already, but it has done little to better the political situation of African-Americans in the past.

3.4 Cultural Appropriation and Authenticity

Since hip-hop music is so dedicated to the ideal of authenticity, its relationship to cultural appropriation seems worth to investigate. The whole concept of cultural appropriation compromises the White rapper's authenticity. According to Young, works

produced by cultural appropriation are involuntarily always inauthentic. According to him the logic behind it is as simple as follows: a White rapper is not a member of the Afro-diasporic experience. Hip-hop is a musical expression that originated with these people. Therefore, a White rapper cannot produce authentic hip-hop music. A conclusion like this demands some further remarks in response. Aside from Young's (2010: 34 - 46) levels of authenticity that are discussed next, Kembrew McLeod's table with dimensions of authenticity will be taken into consideration afterwards as well. These contributions, Young being more theoretical and McLeod empirical, will provide a better understanding of the White rapper's authenticity.

However, before continuing, one should acknowledge that White rappers can be as talented as their African-American counterparts and that a lot of effort goes into their works as well. It seems reasonable not to condemn their music as having no truth to them at all on the basis of their ethnicity. Thus far, this dissertation has attributed great value to inherited ethnicity and will continue to respect this, but a distinction should be made between this and "ethnic absolutism". This term, used by Paul Gilroy, states "that ethnicity is the most important aspect of a person's identity – other social category memberships are insignificant" (Rampton 2005: 299), to which hip-hop seems to adhere so far.

3.4.1 Levels of Authenticity According to James O. Young (2010)

First of all, a work has *provenance authenticity* when it is produced by an in-group member of a certain culture. That White rappers fail on this level of authenticity seems to be undeniable for Young (34), like many others. This builds on the notion that a White rapper remains an outsider who cannot represent the Black experience appropriately. Albert Goldman, an American professor, had this to say in connection to provenance authenticity and blues: "Let's put it bluntly: how can a pampered, milk-faced, middle-class kid who has never had a hole in his shoe sing the blues that belong to some beat-up old black who lived his life in poverty and misery?" (Gracyk 2001: 109). An African-American rapper is said to have *experience authenticity* because he or she lives as a member of the African-American community. White rappers can neither obtain provenance nor experience authenticity, since these are assumed to be

inextricably linked to the possession of African-American ethnicity. So far, these claims flirt with ethnic absolutism and ethnicity as a fixed and unchangeable entity.

Another level of authenticity is *personal authenticity*, which has two requirements. First of all, rappers who are dedicated to their craft are expected to write their own lyrics. If a rapper does not create his or her own rhymes or imitates somebody else, he or she is personally inauthentic. However, important to note is that stylistic elements are often reproduced in hip-hop, like samples of old songs. It is then up to the rapper to give it an innovative twist. Whether or not the White rappers selected for this research are personally authentic in this sense will be harder to determine, since only a very small group of people were involved in their recording processes. For scholars or hip-hop fans it is difficult to guess how much input other people have had during the writing process of an album. However, if there is no doubt about the lyrics being self-written, then personal authenticity in terms of a good work ethic is something a White rapper can obtain. Secondly, a rapper is personally authentic when he presents himself in a truthful way. “Keepin’ it real” is key for maintaining personal authenticity. A White rapper cannot be credible while pretending to belong to the African-American experience – this is in conflict with his provenance authenticity, but he or she can depict other kinds of stories truthfully. Also, belonging to the African-American culture does not necessarily correspond to being personally authentic. African-American rappers can pretend to come from the streets, while they grew up in middle-class families in suburban places. The same applies to White rappers. Vanilla Ice, for example, was popular in the 90s thanks to his hit “Ice Ice Baby”. He lied about his upbringing and quickly became “the most hated man in hip-hop¹⁷” (Dreisinger 2008: 115). This does not mean that everything a rapper says needs to be serious and taken literally. Personal authenticity and “braggadocio” do not interfere with each other. A rapper can use puns and metaphors to brag about himself without being dishonest about his life or roots. Ice-T explains it like this: “In the ghetto, a black man will say, “I’ll take my dick and wrap it around this room three times and fuck yo’ mama.” Now, this man cannot wrap his dick around the room three times, and he probably doesn’t want to fuck your mother, but this

¹⁷ According to the man himself, his financial success was what bothered others, “Back in the day, I was embraced by the black audience. But then my record company crossed me over to the pop market. (...) My album “To The Extreme” sold 15 million copies. When I outsold everybody that had invented the music form – and me being white – they kinda took it offensively” (Vibe 1999: 120 -122).

is how he's gonna talk to another brother. It's a black thang. It's machismo. It doesn't mean anything.” (Ice-T 1994). A fan of hip-hop will know the difference between braggadocio and plain lies.

A final level of authenticity not mentioned by Young is *linguistic authenticity*. Especially in hip-hop music, in which the Spoken Word has priority, language plays an important role. Pennycook (2007: 14) elaborates on this by saying: “Some insist that to be authentic one needs to stick to one’s own cultural and linguistic domain, to draw from one’s own traditions, to be overtly local, others argue that to be authentically local is a question of using a true local variety of language”. Applied to the Belgian music scene, rock and indie artists are more likely to perform in English than rappers. For example, ‘t Hof van Commerce rap in West-Flemish, the boys of Uberdope represent Ghent linguistically, and Slongs Dievanongs’ accent is clearly linked to Antwerp. Considering that rappers from around the world appropriate African-American hip-hop music as a possible effect of globalization, whether or not sticking to local varieties is a choice the artist has to make. This is a second paradox that hip-hop brings forth: it globalizes the “local” AAE, but frowns upon foreigners who use and internalize it in their own performances, calling them “fake”. Full linguistic authenticity is obtained by non-Anglophone rappers who stick to their own linguistic repertoire. This potentially denies them a breakthrough on the global music market. Anglophone White rappers can remain linguistically neutral by employing standard English, which is considered to be White. Or, they can employ features of AAE. Ben Rampton (2005) would call the use of AAE by non-African Americans “crossing”. This concept focuses “on the code-alternation by people who aren’t accepted members of the group associated with the second language they employ. It is concerned with switching into languages that aren’t generally thought to belong to you” (270-271). Applied to the White rapper, being an outsider of the African-American culture, he or she could resort to the use of AAE to nevertheless show their appreciation for it. Although AAE is not a second language for the Anglophone White artist, it still is a very distinctive, unique and ethnically marked variety of English. Therefore, I would argue that AAE fits the definition of being a different “code”, especially for White artists who are not of American descent - as is the focus of this dissertation. In a similar fashion, I would also consider a student from Ghent speaking with a West-Flemish accent to be crossing.

3.4.2 Kembrew McLeod's (1999) Dimensions of Authenticity

From a less theoretical perspective than Young's, Kembrew McLeod has investigated the theme of authenticity directly within hip-hop discourse. He gathered data from magazines, artists, songs, and other non-academic sources to grasp what hip-hop community members perceive to be "real", i.e. authentic, and "fake". Jeffries (2011: 135) adds to this his own reports about a fan whom he interviewed on the importance of being "real". Fred, the interviewee, clearly juxtaposed "realness" against commercialism and the mainstream. In addition to a disdain of these two concepts, Fred expects hip-hop to be familiar and recognizable. A small excerpt from this interview is given next:

Micheal: Why is it important to you that someone be real on a record?

Fred: Because it's what people can relate to. Real people relate. Real recognizes real and they have an appreciation for it. If you're just out there mainstreaming, you're just about your money, you're not about the game. You're not about hip-hop after that.

In Fred's opinion, accumulation of wealth should not be the objective of a rapper. However, a lot of rappers make a living off their music, or at least try to – which echoes the title of the movie "Get Rich, or Try Dying (2005) in which gangsta rapper 50 Cent plays the lead. An option for a well-known and financially successful rapper would be to keep quiet about his or her financial situation. But is the rapper still being "true" then? Assumedly not, if he or she continues to maintain a street-like image. The process of a rapper in search of his position amid all of hip-hop's contradictions seems exhaustive and demanding. The image of authenticity that becomes commercialized is a third paradox of hip-hop.

Here is what the correspondents of McLeod's research thought about what constitutes respectively a "real" and "fake" persona. For each semantic dimension the most referenced element was chosen to fill out the table. Because the one-word categories leave little space for nuance, quotes from the research are discussed as well. These were the results:

Table 1

Dimensions of Authenticity According to members of the Hip-hop Community

Semantic dimensions	Real	Fake
Social-psychological	Staying true to yourself	Following the mass trends
Racial	Black	White
Political-economic	The underground	Commercial
Gender-sexual	Hard	Soft
Socio-locational	The street	The suburbs
Cultural	The old school	The mainstream

Source: Jeffries (2011) who in turn reproduced from McLeod (1999)

As one can see, a racialized notion of authenticity translates into Black as real, and White as fake. Being Black and “true to yourself” appear in the same column, whereas White becomes more easily aligned with commercialism. The paradox of hip-hop music in relation to commercialism has already been paid some attention to. The strong anti-commercial attitude remains ironic in hip-hop. This is because typically, all rappers who want to be successful with their music commercialize their albums. For rappers with ambition, being tied to the underground could be a limitation to their artistic abilities. Hypothetically speaking, if the “old school” formula - which refers to hip-hop’s sound in its early stages - appears to be preferred by a hip-hop community, rappers can design their style in such a way that they go more “old school”, receive more appreciation and accumulate their wealth in that way.

As should be clear by now, the categories of table 1 are all much more entwined than they might seem. Each dimension, even on the “real” side, has implications which stand in dubious relation to the value of authenticity. For example: staying true to yourself forms the trend, street images become commodified, underground rappers get paid, and so on. It is clear that Whites are perceived as being less authentic, if not inauthentic. It was reported by Jeffries about this research that after a collection of data on the basis of personal interviews “neither black nor white respondents advance a narrative of white resentment that blames white people for poisoning pure black hip hop, and they do not discuss their aesthetic preferences in racial terms. However,

respondents do believe that being oneself means embracing one's racial and ethnic identity" (Jeffries 2011: 138). One could imagine that in front of a researcher, interviewees would be rather hesitant to answer positively to statements such as "whites poisoning hip-hop". One could also argue that the dimensions of "realness" do form the basis of an aesthetic that hip-hop fans appreciate. "Staying true to yourself", being "Black", representing "the underground", and so on reflect on the rapper and how consumers estimate him or her. According to Howard S. Becker, the artist and the work represent each other; the "artist's reputations are a sum of the values we assign to the works they have produced" (1982: 23). In other words, the values attributed to the rapper in table 1 are also valid for their work and help shape the aesthetic of this work. The labels "hard" and "street" possibly mark a certain way of talking, and "old school" definitely stands for a particular sound. These can be interpreted as aesthetic elements. It is in the "however"-sentence of Jeffries excerpt that the respondents carefully express their thoughts and expose their bias towards White rappers. They feel that part of the realness of a rapper is to embrace one's racial and ethnic identity. However, for a White rapper to embrace his Whiteness still does not earn him a spot in the "real" column, precisely because he or she is White. By acknowledging his racial ethnicity, the White rapper is confronted with his fakeness within the hip-hop genre - or at least according to McLeod's results. The White rapper takes the paradoxical character of hip-hop to new heights: they have to negotiate between "an ambition to be "real" and a purist belief that "real" rap comes from black men" (Dreisinger 2008: 115), which counts as paradox number four. The respondents also expressed "concerns about hip-hop's influence on the listener's ability to manage their racial selves" (Jeffries 2011: 138). Again, this can be understood in various ways. Arguably, the respondents probably do not have African-American youngsters in mind when uttering this worry. Considering the fact that two-thirds of hip-hop's fan base are suburban white teenagers (Keyes 2002: 5), they are probably the ones in "danger" of changing their behavior, for example their talk. The belief that "listening to black music can make people behave in black ways" (Dreisinger 2008: 113) is an interpretation one would expect to be shared by outsiders of the culture. As Dreisinger mentions further on in his work, this kind of – often hysterical – rhetoric full of metaphors of seduction and contagion was part of the popular discourse of opponents of hip-hop from day one. Betty H. Winfield explains:

“when rap music began appearing in the public consciousness by the mid-1980s, it represented a joining, gang-type of expression. The adult fear was that American youth would indeed join and empathize with the black adolescent urban experience” (Winfield 1999: 13). Quite unexpectedly so, rap fans and rap opponents find common ground in this particular worry of hip-hop’s ability to change one’s ethnic identity. This shows how these listeners authenticating processes are “flawed, context specific, and subjective” (Jeffries 2011: 136). Nevertheless, Jeffries still finds data collected from these listeners useful because it exposes the power authenticity has in their eyes.

3.4.3 Authenticity and Aesthetics

This part is designed to emphasize that even though authenticity is an important value for hip-hop, it does not have to inflict with a song’s aesthetic side. African-American rappers’ work has provenance authenticity, because they belong to the African-American culture that gave rise to hip-hop as a musical expression. But their ethnicity does not necessarily provide them with the mental dexterity or originality one needs in order to be a successful rapper. The same goes for personal authenticity; this is something that one has to work hard for to maintain and to get acknowledged for. But to be an authentic performer does not imply to be a good performer. Arguably, authenticity is not an aesthetic value. One can have provenance authenticity as well as personal authenticity, but still remain aesthetically uninteresting. This idea goes against the notion of ethnic absolutism, because this means that music that is inauthentic can rise above the demanding racial categories and still be aesthetically pleasing. In a society where ethnic absolutism would be the norm, appropriation of any sort would not be accepted. But the reality is that some audiences simply do not care about an artist’s provenance or personal authenticity. Not everybody estimates the ethnic category to which a rapper belongs as being the most important element of their music. When hip-hop songs get remixed and used in dance clubs, other aesthetic values gain ground at the expense of authenticity. When a rapper can prove that he or she masters the style of hip-hop, by for example freestyling in an original way, this can make his or her work popular.

3.5 Summary: The White Rapper's Cultural Appropriation

More than two decennia ago, scholars such as Houston Baker came to the following conclusion concerning White appropriation of Black music: “Unlike rock and roll, rap cannot be hastily and prolifically appropriated or “covered” by White artists. For the black urbanity of the form seems to demand not only a style most readily accessible to black urban youngsters, but also a representational black urban authenticity of performance” (Baker 1993: 62). This quotation hints again at the assumption of White and Black artists being part of different cultures by saying that rap is “most readily accessible” for African Americans. However, White rappers pop up occasionally in the U.S. and beyond. Could this be read as a sign that also for them, this culture is somehow easily accessible? Are they all cultural appropriators who secretly peek over the fence of African-American communities, or are their lives somehow more entwined in reality than one would expect? One can imagine that in the neighborhoods of the lower classes, Whites and African-Americans share those experiences of poverty and drugs many artists rap about. As an outsider of both cultures, this seems like a probable perception to entertain, albeit without certainty.

At the beginning of this chapter, cultural appropriation was considered to explain the White rapper's behavior. After having considered the different types of appropriation, it has become clear that the White rapper potentially participates in style appropriation of hip-hop culture. On top of that, when he or she raps in AAE, there is a case of linguistic appropriation. There is no denying that AAE is typical for African Americans and that non-African-American rappers certainly draw from this specific tradition if they use its grammatical and phonological features. As Mary Bucholtz points out, language plays a key role in the transgressing of racial boundaries. She says: “the ideological link between language and ethnicity is so potent that the use of linguistic practices associated with a given ethnic group may be sufficient for an individual to pass as a group member” (355). This could explain the controversy White rappers spark when they rap in AAE, because it gives the impression of transgressing into another ethnicity. White rappers who use AAE are said to make a cross-racial move and are generally aware of the ethnicity it is linked to. Because of physical performance, White rappers will not be able to pass completely, i.e. to be mistaken for in-group members.

The link between language and ethnicity is also emphasized by Gloria Anzaldúa, who is a scholar of Chicana cultural history. Although Anzaldúa's ethnicity is Hispanic, her citation is applicable beyond that particular context: "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language" (Myers 2005: 133). This connection between ethnicity and language forms a problem for the White rapper who crosses into AAE during performances. Crossing goes against the idea of linguistic authenticity. This introduces a fifth paradox of hip-hop music. If a non-American White rapper wishes to participate in hip-hop, the dogma of authenticity dictates him not to appropriate, pass or cross, but instead be inspired by the own culture. If a White rapper makes music in the same style and linguistic tradition of African-American hip-hop, it will be recognizable as such, but risks being called inauthentic and "wannabe". A quantitative analysis of the White rapper's use of AAE and a closer look at his or her lyrics will provide more answers to this complex phenomenon in chapter five of this dissertation. As was concluded for cultural appropriation, crossing also goes against the idea of ethnic absolutism, because it helps in transgressing borders and eventually making them fade. Rampton's research proved that speakers only cross during situations in which their behavior could not be mistaken for attempts of "passing" and claiming membership of a culture. This, added to the fact that speakers did not cross codes in front of in-group members did confirm that inherited ethnicity remains, as Rampton says: "a basic feature of social reality" (301).

It was also decided that strictly and existentially speaking, appropriation generally brings forth inauthentic products, but the White rapper can still gain authenticity on a personal level. By remaining true to his- or herself, the White rapper appeals to values of credibility and legitimacy that are estimated highly in hip-hop. Despite not belonging to the ethnic group that established hip-hop as a genre, he or she can still gain respect. They can still become acknowledged and successful, since their ethnicity does not determine the aesthetic value of their work.

4 The White Rapper vs. Hip-hop

Until now, the issue of authenticity in regards to the White rapper has been discussed. The first part of this chapter (5.1) will deal with some of the possible strategies he or she can make use of to resolve these problems– which are only valid if he or she desires to be part of the hip-hop culture and become accepted by its members. The other two parts of this chapter will zoom in on two strategies in particular. 5.2 will explain how for some White rappers, class can be a substitution of race. More specifically, attention will be paid to the pejorative term “white trash”, which remains a salient class category within the “White race” today. Finally, 5.3 will briefly present the concept of a “hip-hop nation” and the idea of embracing the music as one’s ethnicity. This is yet another instance in which non-African-American rappers attempt to include themselves into the culture.

4.1 Authenticating Strategies

There exist several strategies that the White rapper with ambitions of being perceived as a “hip-hopper” can use to enhance his authenticity. Most strategies revolve around expressing proximity to “Blackness”. The embracing of Whiteness as the most ironic strategy to become more “black” has already been addressed. Other examples are the emphasis on certain cities and neighborhoods, preferably ones with a high percentage of African-American residents. Secondly, “sexual liaisons with black women can be the feather in a white rapper’s cap” (Dreisinger 2008: 115). Thirdly, being friends and having close connections to African-American rappers and producers can help the White rapper to be taken seriously. Besides this, engaging his- or herself politically to help better the situation of African American in the United States remains another option. The White rapper has to go through a lot to prove himself worthy of being a member of the hip-hop community. This is mainly because of the specific dynamics behind hip-hop. As Gilroy (1987) said, it facilitates “the dispersal and carnivalization of the dominant order”, which means that hip-hop brings forth a lifestyle with new social values. Instead of White being the dominant norm from which African Americans differ, hip-hop makes “Black” the standard, to which Whites have to adjust. For once,

Whites are being pushed to the periphery and African Americans can “experience the self-confidence that belonging to a dominant culture entails” (Alim 2009: 91). Subsequently, White rappers take in subordinate positions and have to prove their skills double as much as their Black counterparts. In terms of authenticity, it seems that the White rapper remains disadvantaged. Ironically, this could function as another card up the White rapper’s sleeve. Namely, it gives them the opportunity to present themselves as underappreciated hard workers, underdogs and even victims of reversed racism. One can imagine that few White rappers would actually be as presumptuous as to claim experiences of racial discrimination themselves. Instead, as Hagedorn and Davis (2008: 118) suggest, “they turn their class position into a kind of race, one that gives them license to speak of suffering”. Therefore, White – especially American - rappers can call themselves “White trash”, which is more than just a swearword. The term actually goes back in American history for quite some time, which shall be explained next.

4.2 “White Trash”

Whereas race is rendered visible on the level of appearances, most specifically focused on skin color, class differences – to a certain extent – can be more difficult to detect. According to Babb (1998: 220), White Americans mostly become stereotypically classified as middle-class, in contrast to African Americans, who are perceived as working-class or even poor. Whites who are not part of the middle class get labeled as “rednecks”, “hillbillies” or White trash. According to Babb, “white trash is typically reserved for whites whose lives are spatially and culturally closest to those of blacks”. She goes on to explain in terms of spatiality that the terms redneck and hillbilly are generally associated with people living in rural environments, and therefore not fitting for inhabitants of the inner-cities. Culturally, White trash cannot depend on their Whiteness. Babb (9) calls Whiteness the “system of privileges accorded to those with white skin”, which becomes invalidated in the case of poor Whites¹⁸. For rappers, this

¹⁸ This statement does not mean to nullify the existence of White privilege in general as it surely does still exist today. Sullivan (2006: 36) says that “It is true that class differences impacted black Americans negatively in the 1930s, it was not true that the causes from which all are suffering are the same”, because racial discrimination plays a big role in the lives of African Americans.

would be an important point to make: “How am I being privileged when I am poor and I cannot get a job?”. White trash is at the bottom of the White hierarchy. It designates “a border position between white privilege and black disenfranchisement” (Bernardi 2007: 354). White trash would commonly feel more attracted to poor black and Latino culture, which was visible, urban, and cool (Babb 1998: 220) compared to the invisibility of Whiteness. Taylor (2005: 347) even speaks of a “white double consciousness¹⁹” due to being both White and lower working-class. Because the – false - generic identity “white and successful” does not apply for White trash, they tend to identify more with African Americans who are in the same class position. Then again, in hip-hop, Whites are considered inferior and are “forced to see themselves through the eyes of Black people” (Alim 2009: 79) which reinforces the idea of a White double consciousness. On the other hand, proposing a White double consciousness as an alternative for the historical notion of the Black double consciousness seems close to comparing apples to oranges. Black double consciousness has stretched itself way beyond the reach of a music genre and could not be put aside because it was an omnipresent part of African Americans’ lives. Instead of creating the notion of a White double consciousness, one could preferably say that Whites who participate in hip-hop can experience how a Black double consciousness must have felt or feel like.

The term White trash goes back to the 19th century, when various interpretations circulated. Northern abolitionists blamed the slave society for the corruption of Whites into “trash”, whereas the proslavery Southerners thought natural inferiority to be the cause. On their side, the eugenicists argued that the lowly status of some Whites was a result of miscegenation (Wray 2006: 137). Wray also explains how the “American hookworm disease” was considered to be a cause for White trash at the beginning of the 20th century. Once the poor Whites would be cured from their hookworm, which brought about a “laziness disease”, “they would regain the superior moral, intellectual, and cultural qualities that were their racial birthright” (138). All of this makes it clear that there was simply no room for lazy, poor, and/or unemployed Whites in the mind of White hegemonic America. The act of stigmatizing the less successful Whites with

¹⁹ This is a White alternative for the historical “Black double consciousness” that was coined by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903. It stands for the double life African Americans have to live as both a marginalized group and Americans. The double consciousness stems from the notion of always seeing oneself through the eyes of the other, dominant group in society. More information is given in the appendix under “passing”.

labels such as White trash was meant to exclude “embarrassing” Whites from the White supremacist race. Once more, this underlines the notion of how race is socially constructed and not always all-inclusive. The White trash-label is an example of how race relies for a large part on ideas and attitudes, and not on biology.

While in theory, this Americanized term could – strictly speaking - only apply to White American Eminem, the strategy of putting class before race could be used by any White rapper. An analysis of the strategies discussed in this fifth chapter will be included in the study of Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Classified. Themes of drugs, financial troubles, and general hardship become discussed in the lyrics of all three.

4.3 Hip-hop Nation

Tangled up in the ethnically strict and paradoxical world of hip-hop, some White rappers choose to identify with the music as their ethnicity. In order to avoid further alienation from the genre by acknowledging their Whiteness, they ignore the existing racial categories: they *are* hip-hop instead. This gives them a right to speak on the genre they are engaged in. Belonging to a Hip-hop Nation defines the White rapper as a person and a musician (Hagedorn and Davis 2008: 118-119). This Nation is a “multilingual, multiethnic nation with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present” (Alim 2009: 3). In other words, it detaches hip-hop from its origins in New York and makes it a global given accessible for all. In addition, it can be interpreted as an “imagined community”. Coined by Benedict Anderson, the members of an imagined community share an authentic national identity and usually perceive themselves as a homogeneous group (Cheng 2004: 4). The labels “hip-hop” or “American” suffice in letting people trust in the “bigger picture” and fight for the ideal of an nation, all without being able to meet all of its associates.

Members of the Global Hip-Hop Nation (GHHN) cross when they use AAE. Surveys show (Green 2002; Labov 1972; Rickford 1999) that non-African American speakers use AAE differently than African Americans do. Most apparent is their inconsistency in “classical features such as r-lessness, pitch, copula deletion, habitual be, and lexical items such as “aks” (ask)” (Alim 2009: 97). White rappers who use

features of AAE wish to affiliate with African-American culture yet miss the linguistic skills to do so fluently. It should be noted here that African-Americans rappers may also show inconsistency in their use of AAE, in the sense that they might overuse some features to help establish their “street conscious identity” (Alim 2003). This implies that the AAE used in hip-hop music is not a 100 percent truthful account of these performers actual use of the variety. The difference between everyday talk and performance should be kept in mind.

5 Linguistic Analysis of Four Anglophone Rappers

This chapter is built on this premise: when the White rapper employs an array of distinct AAE features, it is clear that he or she wants to join in with the African-American hip-hop crowd, or at least is aware of rap music's origins as an African-American dominated genre. A White rapper who does not affiliate with African Americans linguistically and who taps into other linguistic traditions probably does not care that much about hip-hop as the 'mother culture' of rap. Normally, this attitude would be reflected in their lyrics. For example, there is no mentioning of "hip-hop". Neither would one expect feelings of accountability towards the genre concerning their Whiteness to be expressed. White rappers who present themselves as "hip-hoppers" do have to face these kinds of questions, and are often forced to provide answers to them via their lyrics. To start off, part 6.1 will provide a basic informative framework of AAE in order to fully grasp the distinctiveness and attitude that comes along with this ethnically marked variety. Secondly, 6.2 will elaborate on the methodology used for the research. Finally, in 6.3 the results of the analysis will be discussed for Eminem (6.3.1), Iggy Azalea (6.3.2), and Classified (6.3.3). A short overview of this will be provided in 6.3.4.

5.1 African-American English (AAE)

Throughout this dissertation, AAE has been referred to as a variety of English, and not as a separate language. This notion is supported by the "creolist hypothesis". This theory states that AAE was initially a creole language that was used between Africans and Europeans in times of slavery. After some time, AAE became more and more influenced by North-American dialects, which caused its decreolization. This means that original features of AAE were lost and replaced by English ones (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998: 221). This hypothesis explains the African influences²⁰ and assumes AAE's status today to be that of a "variety", which is also how Rickford (1999: 327) and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998: 213) see it.

²⁰ For example, the absence of copula *be*, a salient feature of AAE, is also found in languages in Congo (Rickford 1999: 325);

In contrast to other region-dependent dialects spoken in the US, AAE has widely recognizable patterns of lexicon, grammar and phonology that can be noticed basically anywhere in the country and especially among working-class African Americans. An obvious reason for this strong linguistic bond among African Americans is the solidarity that suffering from a system of slavery and living in a Jim Crow Era²¹ brought about (Wolfram 1998 & Schilling-Estes: 218). Because of segregation, AAE remained originally preserved and fairly uninfluenced by standard English over the years. Today, similarities between AAE and other Southern dialects can be found, for example the use of “ain’t” and double negation. However, remarkable for AAE is the higher frequency of use of these features (Rickford 1999: 11).

For a lot of African Americans, the use of AAE symbolizes resistance against the White American hegemonic society, which often deems the variety as mere slang²². Other attitudes that are often expressed are for example that it is “unintelligent” or a “lazy, imperfectly learned approximation to real English” (Filmore 1997: 2). Users of AAE ignore the social stigma and tend to turn it into a self-empowering aspect of their identity. AAE’s resistance to assimilation is exceptional. It goes against Giles and Smith’s (1979) theory of accommodation, which states that speakers of a stigmatized dialect are prone to adjust their speech to the norm. Speakers of AAE can be seen to do the exact opposite. Instead of trying to become part of the hegemonic in-group, they form their own distinct speech community from which they exclude others. This distinctiveness is echoed in the “divergence hypothesis” that was first established by William Labov in 1983. With this theory, Labov claims that the variety is diverging from other American dialects. During his research in Philadelphia he found that features that were slowly disappearing in others were becoming more apparent in AAE (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998: 179).

In conclusion, the use of AAE is often described as a statement of “disaffection towards the Standard among young African Americans throughout the country” (Morgan 2009: 72). Today, AAE has attracted a more broad audience of users since it

²¹ The Jim Crow laws were implemented to keep the races separated. The idea behind it expressed feelings of inferiority towards African-American citizens. The battle for equality was finally won in the 1960s by the Civil Rights Movements of that time, when the Civil Rights Act which put an end to Jim Crow was passed (Rhea 1997: 94);

²² Slang is not the same as a dialect, instead it refers to new and short-lived vocabulary (Rickford 1999: 321) usually associated with teenagers.

entered the mainstream via commercial hip-hop. In this light, it has become “an international language, a style that connects and defines the self-image of countless teenagers” (Alim 2009: 15). However, its roots remain undeniably African-American and therefore the usage of AAE by non-African Americans can be perceived as a cross-racial move.

5.2 Methodology

The research is comprised of a quantitative analysis of in total four well-known Anglophone rappers. There is one African-American rapper, J. Cole, and three non-African-American rap artists. An African-American rapper was chosen to linguistically compare to the others in order to see how J. Cole as a legitimate in-group AAE speaker uses the variety differently. As mentioned before, the three rappers are White American Eminem, Australian female rapper Iggy Azalea and Canadian Classified. An American rapper was chosen to see if his proximity to African-American culture influenced his speech more or less than those of other, more distanced rappers. For this research, it seemed most appropriate to choose for performers whose first language is English. In that case, a choice for AAE marks an obvious shift in linguistic behavior, since they already have an English variety at their disposal. For other artists who have learned English as a second or third language, the use of AAE could possibly be treated as their preferred version of English, without making switches in its varieties. My choice for Anglophone rappers is thus motivated by the assumptions that native English speakers are more conscious of the differences between English varieties and that a choice for AAE links them to African-American culture.

For each rapper, approximately 30 minutes of data was randomly chosen from their most recent albums. This is meant to give an up-to-date view on the use of AAE in contemporary hip-hop. For example, between Eminem’s first studio album “Infinite” and Iggy Azalea’s first - and only album so far – called “The New Classic” are 18 years.

The analysis itself was constructed via a core set of features of AAE taken from the extensive list that Rickford (1999: 4-9) proposed as being “distinctive features”. A choice was made based on the rappers’ opportunities to incorporate them in their performance. The core set, made up out of six AAE features found with all four rappers,

is presented next. Underneath it are examples of AAE utterances together with the Standard English (SE) alternative.

1. Absence of copula/auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense states and actions

E.g.: “He Ø nice” for Standard English “He’s nice”

2. Absence of third person singular present tense *-s*

E.g.: “He runØ” for SE “He runs”

3. Use of invariant *be* for habitual aspect AND for future

E.g.: “She be talking behind my back” for SE “She usually talks behind my back”

E.g.: “He Ø be here in a minute” for SE “He will be here in a minute”

4. Use of unstressed *been* for SE *has/have been*

E.g.: “I Ø been sick” for SE “I have been sick”

5. Use of *ain('t)* as a general preverbal negator

E.g.: “They ain’t here” for SE “They aren’t here”

6. Use of a double negation after *ain 't*

E.g.: “Ain’t nobody here” for SE “there isn’t anybody here”

The first feature (1) is unique in AAE (Rickford 1999: 61) and therefore a clear marker of African-American identity or affiliation. High results of absent copula’s in the speech of White rappers will be considered as a desired move towards the African-American in-group. Other features, like 5 and 6, may also appear in other dialects, as no dialect can exist in a vacuum and remain untouched by surrounding varieties, but will be used more often – as said before – and also used differently by speakers of AAE. When grammar constructions look similar on the surface, but their use and meaning turns out different, these similarities are called “camouflaged forms” (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998: 216), which is said to be the case for a lot of AAE’s features. The core set is comprised of grammatical features instead of phonological ones. Even though there

were phonological instances of AAE in all of the rappers' speech, I chose not to incorporate these for the collection of my data. The speed of rapping and background music occasionally made it hard to determine whether or not a purely phonological feature was used. These uncertainties would have rendered my research inaccurate. For example, the use of [ð] as [d] and [θ] as [t] was difficult to count because the words sometimes follow one another in such a speed that beginnings and endings of words started to fade. Other phonological examples that were not used for my research are: the realization of *ng* as *n* – e.g. “talkin” – that is prominent in a lot of music styles, a deletion of an *r* after a vowel – e.g. “brotha” - realization of *ing* as *ang* – e.g. “thang” – and a realization of “I’m going to do it” as “I’mma do it”. In my opinion, grammatical structures seem more anchored in AAE than phonological features. Therefore, I find that they bear more symbolical meaning that links them to African-American tradition. In linguistics, it is generally known that the borrowing of grammatical features into other varieties or languages happens rather rarely or at a very slow rate (Dixon 1997: 26).

Before I started my analysis, I turned to the website RapGenius.com for a complete set of lyrics. RapGenius - “the interactive guide to human culture” (RapGenius.com) - is governed by moderators who check and correct the lyrics that are posted on their platform. Before adding something to the website, “Contributor Guidelines” are to be followed. Despite its non-academic status, this website has been very useful for my understanding of rap lyrics. Since I am not an in-group member of the hip-hop community and topologically far away from all of these four rappers, other members at RapGenius provided me with intertextual information and lexical explanations that would have been very hard to decode otherwise. I checked the lyrics for three or four times before I started my analysis, while listening to the audio on Youtube or Spotify where the entire albums were posted in their originality. Few mistakes were detected and corrected.

The analysis itself was conducted as follows: first, the lyrics were put in a word-file. Then the usage opportunities for each feature were counted. For the first two features (1 and 2), all copula and auxiliary *be* and third person *-s* opportunities were underlined. For the habitual and future *be* the utterances with respectively *usually*, *normally*, *regularly* and *will be* were marked and counted as well. Same principle went

for the fourth feature (4), with all *been* and *have been* utterances. For the fifth feature (5), the use of *ain't* as well as *am not*, *aren't*, *isn't*, *hasn't*, *haven't*, *didn't* in both contracted and full form were taken into account. Feature 6 expresses how many times *ain't* appeared together with a double negation. So for each feature, both the AAE and SE opportunities were taken into consideration to draw percentages from. These were calculated in an excel file. The results for each rapper, starting with African-American J. Cole, are displayed next.

5.3 Results

For each rapper separately, a brief introduction will be given. Then, the percentages of used AAE features will be shown in a graph. Finally, excerpts from their lyrics will be addressed to shed light on their position in the hip-hop scene. Attention will be paid to their views on authenticity and to their personal strategies to fit in. The words in brackets that follow quotes are the titles of songs from the albums that were selected for the rappers.

5.3.1 J. Cole

J. Cole is short for Jermaine Lamarr Cole, who was born in 1985 in Frankfurt, Germany, on an American military base to an African-American father and a German mother. When he was eight months old, Cole and his mother moved to North Carolina. When he graduated high school, his grades were good enough to go to St. John's University with a scholarship. He graduated magna cum laude in communication in 2007. After he put out his first mixtape called "The Come Up" in the same year, he caught the attention of hip-hop coryphaeus and businessman Jay-Z, who signed him to his record label Roc Nation (As reported by rap.about.com and npr.org). Jay-Z saw in J. Cole a talented young rapper and moreover, an opportunity to target one particular segment of consumers. Jay-Z said: "J. Cole's young, he's a college graduate, he should hit these markets, the college market, we're going on a college tour" (Greenburg 2011). Although being part of a large marketing machine, "J. Cole never saw himself as "selling-out" rather he thought by being played on large scale radio airwaves, he would

then be able to open a door and “reintroduce (listeners) to honesty, show ‘em that they need more” (Howard 2014: 154-155). In 2014, J. Cole released “2014 Forest Hills Drive” which refers to his former address and reminds him of times when his family used to struggle. Cole clearly wanted to live up to the promise he made of going back to “honesty”, as he toured Europe with his new album under the heading “The Real is Back”. The AAE results presented next were gathered from this album, from 7:15 until 37:28 minutes, for a total of 30.13 minutes of data.

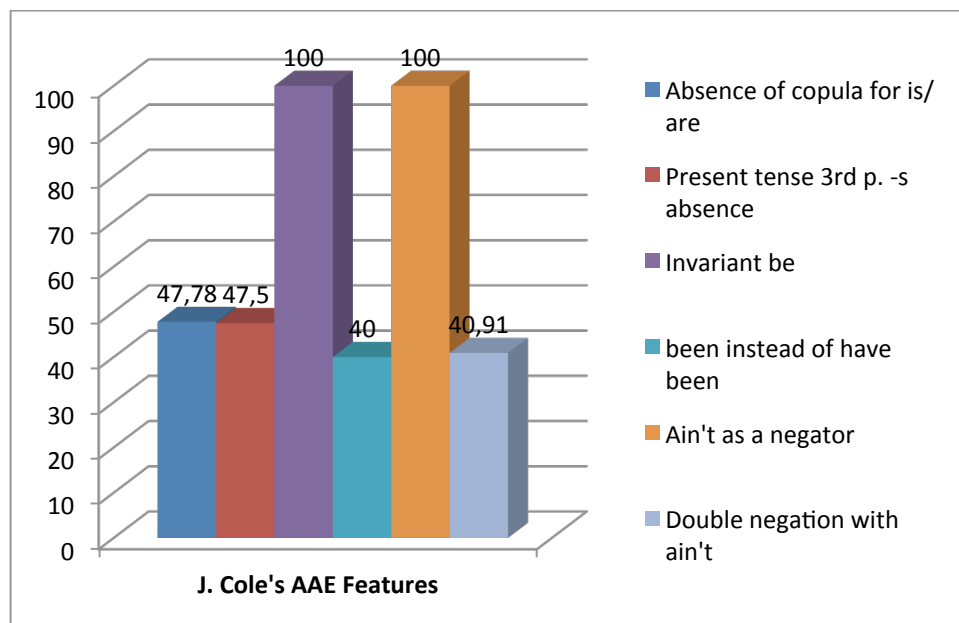


Figure 1. J Cole’s AAE Features in “2014 Forest Hills Drive” (2014)

Feature 1 and 2 appear a little less than half of the time Cole has the chance to employ them. In rap coming from an African-American rapper, one could expect these numbers to be higher. Morgan also confirms that “copula absence and deletion exists as a rule” (Morgan 2002: 129) within the genre. Cole’s inconsistency arguably proves that his use of AAE’s most prominent features (1 and 2) are part of his performance, and not of his everyday speech. Then again, it is important to keep in mind that speakers of AAE do not use all the features 100 percent of the time (Rickford 1999: 9). Feature 3 and 5 are used at every linguistic opportunity. Out of all the times that J. Cole used *ain't*, 40,91% of the time it was coupled with a double negation. Overall, the high use of these features can give the impression of the overall delivery to sound AAE, even if feature 4 and 6 were used less than half of the time. Other features used by J. Cole that were not or a lot

less found in the linguistic behavior of the other White rappers are for example: *finna* to mark immediate future, use of verb stem (V) as past tense or preterite form (V-ed) – e.g.: “I start sweating” for SE “I started sweating”, absence of possessive –s, slight metathesis in words such as *ask* which becomes pronounced as *as*, use of object pronouns after a verb as personal datives – e.g.: “I’mma get *me* a gun”, the use of they to mark the possessive – e.g.: “they mamas”, and more. No quantitative research was performed on the basis of these features because the other rappers’ lyrics did not always have the opportunity to include them. Of all rappers, J. Cole used the most differentiated set of AAE features. Also striking about his 30 minutes of data was that it is comprised of only his utterances, no other artists were featured. Moreover, most songs were produced by Cole himself. After having listened to a couple of interviews, Cole’s speech could definitely be classified as AAE, but rather watered down compared to his linguistic behavior in his performances. Phonologically, Cole’s speech could be characterized as East Coast according to Morgan (2002: 128) who mentions glottal stops, reducing of consonant clusters and an overall shortening of words. The lengthening and stretching of vowels can be noticed more on the West Coast.

Lyrically, J. Cole inscribes himself in the story-telling tradition by rapping about personal anecdotes of a first love, struggling financially and considering selling drugs, reflecting on times before he was famous, and so on. Typical for hip-hop lexicon that is present in J. Cole’s work is lexical expansion through inversion (Morgan 2002: 121). This means that new vocabulary is gained from the reversal of word meanings. In SE, to be “ill” would be regarded as something negative, whereas in hip-hop, to be the “illest” would be a great accomplishment. The same goes for adjectives like “bad” and “mad”, which becomes newly contextualized as for example “good”, “skilled” or “admired”.

The first time Cole talks about White people, is when he recalls selling a White boy some low-quality weed. Notice the high density of AAE features in this example alone: “Dime for a dub, them white boys ain’t know no better / Besides, what’s twenty dollars to a nigga like that? / He tell his pops he need some lunch and he gon’ get it right back” (’03 Adolescence). In this particular excerpt, J. Cole juxtaposes himself, African-American and “hustlin” for money, to the financially spoiled White boys who do not know a lot about drugs. Most striking is his use of the controversial “nigga”. Generally, this term is perceived as an in-group marker of African Americans that “indexes a

stance of cool solidarity for young black men” (Smitherman 1994) and excludes Whites. In this case, Cole uses the term to address someone of the White race. It is safe to say that even though this is a fairly new tendency, reciprocity by a White person is still not accepted. Cecilia Cutler’s research (2002) also paid attention to the word “nigga” as a solidarity marker used among Whites, which she perceived as quite common. For its contemporary use, “nigga” and the word “dude” mean pretty much the same, but the use of “nigga” in biracial social interaction remains problematic. This was also confirmed by my own research. Figure 2 below shows how many times the word “nigga” appeared in each of the 30 minutes of data. The discrepancy between the White rappers and African-American rapper J. Cole is striking. In Eminem’s case, the only “nigga” was used by African-American Kendrick Lamar, who was featured on the song “Love Game”. As for Iggy Azalea, the African-American rapper T.I. marks the “1” in her figure. The same goes for Classified, because African-American rapper Raekwon was responsible for the only “nigga” utterance in his case. Overall, this figure shows that only J. Cole with 82 “nigga” utterances feels at ease using the term.

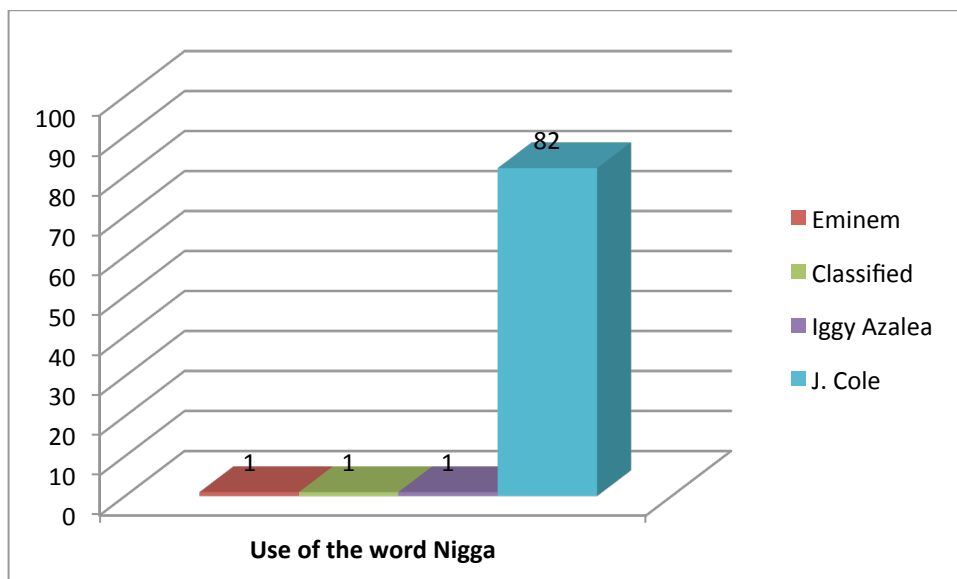


Figure 2. The Use of the Controversial Word “Nigga” in All of the Selected Rappers’ Lyrics in Absolute Numbers

A second time J. Cole addresses a White person as “nigga” marks a very important moment in his album, when he addresses the topic of cultural appropriation in his song “Fire Squad”:

History repeats itself and that's just how it goes
Same way that these rappers always bite each other's flows
Same thing that my nigga Elvis did with Rock n Roll
Justin Timberlake, Eminem and then Macklemore
While silly niggas argue over who gon' snatch the crown²³
Look around, my nigga, white people have snatched the sound
This year I'll prolly go to the awards dappered down
Watch Iggy win a Grammy as I try to crack a smile

In this excerpt, J. Cole again uses “nigga” transracially to talk about Elvis, who is said to be at the start of a long tradition of White appropriation of Black music. By making the comparison to rock ‘n roll, Cole argues that the same pattern of appropriation will repeat itself in rap. More specifically, the tendency of White artists to steal ideas and profits away from African Americans. This echoes the worries that were expressed in 3.3.1 under style appropriation. In this excerpt, Cole mentions two of the three rappers that will be analyzed in the upcoming parts, namely Eminem and Iggy Azalea. The latter was nominated for a Grammy-award for “Best Rap Album”, which created a big fuss - she did not receive it in the end. When it comes to the music industry’s award shows, White artists winning in rap and hip-hop categories never fails to stir up emotions. In 2014, the aforementioned White rapper Macklemore won three Grammys in the rap category, for which he spontaneously apologized to rapper Kendrick Lamar for having “robbed” him of his prize. This rhetoric reminds one of how Baraka used to perceive White appropriation as a robbery. To this day, this particular discourse of White musical theft is still going strong within hip-hop. In an interview on the radio station hot 97, African-American rapper Azealia Banks, who even teared up towards the end of the excerpt, explained her feelings towards White performers - Iggy Azalea in specific – as follows:

²³ This line is an example of a popular hip-hop theme that underscores the genre’s competitive nature, namely the verbal fight about who can crown himself “king of hip-hop” and sit on the figurative throne. Already in the 1990s, Notorious B.I.G. crowned himself the king of rap (Kick in the Door). The ubiquitous Kendrick Lamar has put the crown on his head in “King Kunta”. Rapper Pusha T aksed, “if the crown ain’t mine tell me who am I behind?” (Lunch Money). J. Cole himself says to have went from a peasant to a king (Fire Squad). Countless examples could be given here. For female rappers, verbal battles are fought out over who can crown herself “queen”.

In this country, whenever it comes to our “things” like black issues, or black politics or black music, or whatever, there is always this undercurrent of kinda like “fuck y’all niggas”, “you don’t really own shit”, you know what I’m saying? And... That Macklemore album wasn’t better than the Drake record. (...) that Iggy Azalea shit is not better than any fucking black girl that’s rapping today. It’s like a cultural smudging, is what I see. When they give these Grammys out, all it says to white kids is like: “oh yeah you’re great, you’re amazing, you can do whatever you put your mind to”. And it says to black kids: “you don’t have shit, you don’t own shit, not even the shit you created for yourself”

This quote makes clear that the music industry’s recognition of White hip-hop remains inappropriate and even offending for some African-American hip-hop artists. Someone who does not share these feelings is hip-hop’s household name Snoop Dogg, who told the New York Times that “rap is supposed to grow” and that people like Macklemore and Iggy Azalea, who are inspired by hip-hop, have “soul”. On the 18th of May, J. Cole was awarded “Top Rap Album” on the Billboard Music Awards. Also up for nomination were – again – Iggy Azalea and Eminem, with the albums that were included for this research. J. Cole is generally appreciated by the hip-hop community who highly value Cole’s skills and authenticity. I based these impressions on what Androutsopoulos would call “tertiary” hip-hop texts (Alim 2009: 14), which represents the discourse of the hip-hop community on the Internet on forums, articles, and video clips. Cole’s award is proof of a positive relationship between him and the hip-hop-loving audience. Nevertheless, Cole’s highly valued position in the genre should not be taken for granted. Does he really embody what an authentic African-American rapper should be like? Arguably, there are a lot of factors that go against some of hip-hop’s principles, as they were presented by Kembrew McLeod in 3.4.2. Whereas he remains true to his roots - naming his new album after his old address, for example - his rap act was very consciously designed to become a commercial success. Besides growing up to a single mother who struggled financially, Cole was not from the “hood”. He was not a street smart “hustler”, but rather an intelligent college graduate when his career kicked off. His suburban upbringing, high education and commercial approach to

his first records as part of Jay-Z's marketing machine do not equip him with the most authentic set of characteristics he would allegedly need in order to be accepted as a rapper who does hip-hop. In an interview with Wall Street Journal, this topic was explicitly addressed.

Interviewer: "Do you think from a marketing stand point, do you think it would have been easier if you had sold drugs in the street and that was part of your narrative? Is that more respected than graduating magna cum laude?"

J. Cole: "For sure, [...] there's an appeal, like Scarface is a lot o' kids' favorite movie for a reason. There is an appeal to that edginess of like "yo, I was in the streets, and I sold drugs", [...] When you have that story, and it's real and authentic, and you can mix that with a skillful way to tell it, of course, that would have been way easier for me."

Although this quote seems to entertain the notion that J. Cole does not engage in these kinds of narratives, his latest album does flirt with themes of drugs, theft, and the streets. One can conclude that J. Cole is not completely authentic according to the strict rules that especially White rappers are subjected to. Hypothetically speaking, if Iggy Azalea would have won the "Top Rap Album" award instead of J. Cole earlier this month, there would have been an outcry coming from the hip-hop community. Does that mean that besides all of these requirements that hip-hop scholars like to quote, ethnicity remains the most important determination of "authentic hip-hop"? Could it be that J. Cole's "Blackness" – though being mixed race – dominates over all other dimensions of authenticity. Applied to Young's levels of authenticity, this would mean that provenance authenticity is estimated as more important than personal authenticity? If this would be true, the dynamics behind hip-hop does seem to revolve around ethnic absolutism. The most fitted artist to prove this statement wrong is American rapper Eminem. In his case, he seems to have "won the sometimes grudging respect of hip-hop purists and critics" (Huxley 2000: 2).

5.3.2 Eminem

Born as Marshall Bruce Mathers III, Eminem was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1975. His father, Marshal II, left the family behind when Eminem was only six months old. He claims to have had a “stereotypical, trailer park, white trash upbringing” (Huxley 2000: 7), which in itself also reveals the poverty he endured. When he was 12 years old the family moved to Detroit (Vibe 1999: 120), a city that is known for its high percentage of African-Americans inhabitants. He eventually dropped out of high school at the age of 17. In rap he found an outlet to express his frustration, anger and love for language. His first album called “Infinite” (1996) was a low-budget product that attracted only local attention. After another release of his work, Eminem was discovered by hip-hop mogul and producer Dr. Dre, who became Eminem’s right hand man. In 1999, with the help of Dre, “The Slim Shady LP” was released and went multiplatinum.

A year later, “The Marshall Mathers LP” was “noted as the fastest selling album in rap history” (as reported by Biography.com). In 2002, the semi-biographical movie of Eminem’s life called “8 Mile” appeared in theatres. The story is about a poor White kid who grows up in Detroit, has a talent for rapping but a hard time getting accepted by the African-American-dominated hip-hop scene. He gets beaten up, fights with his single mother, but eventually blows everyone away with his rhyming abilities and establishes himself as a respectable rap artist. This movie, with its undeniable similarities to Eminem’s own life, showed how the White boy with blue eyes struggled for recognition. Hagedorn and Davis (2008: 118) have interpreted the main undertone of the movie as an engagement in a fantasy of victimhood, one that would help earn respect among his fellow rappers. Without a lot of resistance from the hip-hop community, Eminem was named “King of Hip-hop” in 2011 By the Rolling Stones magazine (Aretha 2012: 11). What set him apart from other White rap acts was his credibility when rapping about suffering²⁴. Hip-hop demanded an authentic street image, which Eminem could deliver on the basis of his disadvantaged youth, having lived in an African-American populated city. Taylor (2005: 346) perceives Eminem as a cross-over artist and a “wigger”, a contraction of “wannabe/white nigger”. He goes on to mention how Eminem has been blamed for being a “culture stealer” and even called

“the rap Hitler” (349). A closer look at his linguistic behavior could resolve if Eminem really is a “wannabe” who is confused about his ethnic identity. AAE features were counted from 1.01:45 until 1.31:40 minutes for a total of 29.96 minutes of data from “The Marshall Mathers LP 2”, released in 2013. This is only a fraction of all that Eminem has produced over the years and therefore, the content of these lyrics will not be able to represent his attitude towards the hip-hop genre to the fullest, but only provide a glimpse. The results from my quantitative research are presented in figure 3.

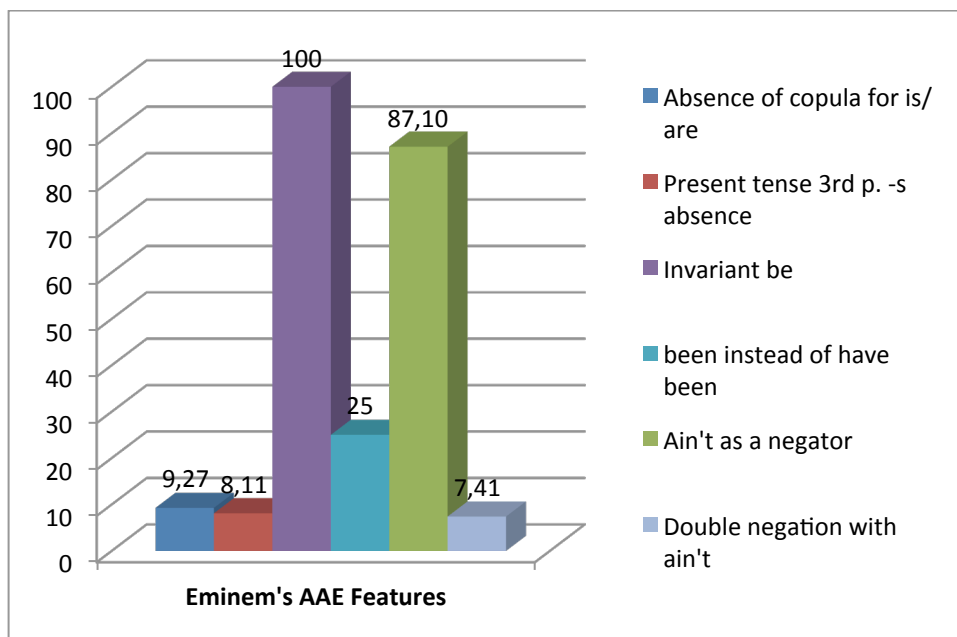


Figure 3. Eminem’s AAE Feaures in “The Marshall Mathers LP 2” (2013)

For someone who grew up in the proximity of African Americans, Eminem’s features are surprisingly low on an average. The two most striking markers of AAE speech, feature 1 and 2, are below a ten percent threshold. *Ain’t*, feature 5, which is arguably AAE’s most accessible feature for non-African Americans, is used a lot, as well as the invariant *be*. The overall impression of Eminem’s linguistic patterns as far as this core set goes is only slightly AAE. The habitual *be* is used on all occasions, but this does not pop up all the time in his lyrics and is therefore less powerful in representing this core set by itself. Eminem’s linguistic appropriation is thus limited; he does not mimic African Americans’ style on a language level. He does not cross since that would require a much higher use of these six features. His speech is not to be confused with that of an in-group member of the African-American community. Also in interviews,

Eminem seems to have a normal Midwest American accent. In his rap, he developed a style that mixed the lyrics and style of the East Coast with the beats and gangsta attitude of the West Coast (Aretha 2012: 29). Aside from his urban street stylized clothes, Eminem, with his bleached blonde hair, never tried to come close to African-American appearance.

What safeguarded Eminem's success in hip-hop, was the "owning up" to his Whiteness. He was aware of a "system of privileges accorded to those with white skin" (Babb 1998: 9) and instead of shying away from that debate; he engaged in it and criticized it. By assuming the role of the underdog²⁵, he would prove his verbal abilities to "spit rhymes" twice as much as others. In a song called "Role Model", Eminem raps: "Some people only see that I'm white, ignoring skill". Even though he had no provenance authenticity because he was not African-American, his talents and personal story have enabled him to connect with other hip-hop artists and audiences in disadvantaged neighborhoods. He does not pretend not to take part in a commercialized business. In "White America", he acknowledges that his skin color probably got him more fans, and helped him target a new, mostly White audience.

Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself
If they were brown Shady'd lose, Shady sits on the shelf
But Shady's cute, Shady knew, Shady's dimples would help
Make ladies swoon baby (ooh baby!), Look at my sales
Let's do the math: if I was black, I woulda sold half

According to McLeod's model, Eminem can still be attributed with authenticity because of his tough upbringing in Detroit. Secondly, on a gender-sexual level, he was just as harsh in his lyrics for homosexuals and women as his African-American counterparts. Other strategies employed – consciously or not - to heighten his authenticity are for example his tie to producer Dr. Dre, who could confirm his "realness" and who addresses Eminem as "nigga" in for example the rap song "What's the Difference". Even though this term could be perceived as starting to loosen up as a pejorative term

²⁵ In "Baby", Eminem raps: "I love being an underdog / cause when I'm pushed, I end up swinging". This probably points to the scrutiny Eminem was under for being White, which made him work harder ("pushed") to achieve success ("swinging").

among youngsters, Eminem has declared to never use the term to address one of his friends (Cutler 2014). Cutler also explains that the use by African Americans themselves does not entail a race-referenced insult or invoke any sort of hierarchy, whereas this could be interpreted as such from a White rapper. Another strategy, the proximity to “Blackness” is definitely part of Eminem’s career. At one point, he surrounded himself solely with African-American rappers to form a hip-hop band called D12. On the 30 minutes of data that was analyzed, one African-American rapper - again Kendrick Lamar – was featured.

After having released eight albums, one can expect that Eminem is through with the subject of his Whiteness. From the start of his career, Eminem felt like it was all people could talk about. In an interview with the magazine “Vibe” (1999) he confessed: “I get offended when people come to me and ask me, “so, being a white rapper...” and “being that you’re white...” and “So growing up white” [...] and white white white white is all I ever seem to hear instead of the music” (118). In his lyrics that were taken up as data for this research, he did not address the topic explicitly anymore. In the song “Evil Twin” he reminisces the time when he had to prove himself as a rapper, saying: “I just wanted to skip school and rap, used to mop floors / flip burgers and wash dishes, but I wrote rhymes trying to get props for ‘em / cause I took book-smarts and swapped for ‘em / They were sleeping, I made ‘em stop snorin’ / Made them break out the popcorn / now I’ve been hip-hop in its tip-top form”. Eminem does not perceive himself as just a rapper; he feels he truly represents hip-hop culture. A couple of lines later, he aligns himself as a rapper with Tupac and the Notorious B.I.G. Both are gangsta rappers who are perceived to have shaped this subgenre of rap and who died in the 90s as a result of a drive-by shooting. In “Baby”, Eminem raps about “being the king of the playground” which ties him in with the typical “royalty” discourse of hip-hop. He shows his dedication to the genre in “Groundhog Day” by saying: “one day uncle Ronnie brought over this new, but different / music into the picture and it became my new religion [...] and somehow I saw my future is in this, that’s how I know my mission”. The song describes how he would practice his lyrics and how his career started and eventually became “the Rap Game’s God”. Although he does not account for his Whiteness anymore, Eminem still feels the need to display his passion for the

genre, in an effort to claim his deserved position among other well-established “hip-hoppers”.

All in all, one could argue that Eminem’s low number of linguistic appropriation has helped him to become accepted by African-American artists and hip-hop fans. The late Proof, who was an African-American rapper and close friend of Eminem, confirmed this assumption in Vibe Magazine. “Keep in mind, he’s always lived in black neighborhoods. Even back then, I considered him a white boy who raps, rather than a white boy who’s trying to be black. [...] He didn’t try to copy the slang (Vibe 120). Moreover, he was not perceived as fake because he signaled awareness of his skin color, its commercial implications and his position as a White rapper in the genre without being too apologetic about it.

5.3.3 Iggy Azalea

Amethyst Amelia Kelly, better known as female rapper Iggy Azalea was born in 1990 in Sydney, Australia. When she was 16, she moved to Miami to pursue her dream of becoming a rapper. Before achieving international fame with music, Azalea was primarily active in modeling. After the publication of some videos on YouTube that raised attention, her career started to kick off in 2011 with the release of her first mixtape “Ignorant Art”. She moved from Miami to Houston and Atlanta, where she allegedly got her infamous Southern “drawl²⁶” from. She was the first non-African-American female rapper to be issued on the 2012 cover of XXL-magazine and to be listed among other hip-hop performers on their “Top Ten Freshman”-list. In 2013, Azalea had a deal sealed with the hip-hop music label Def Jam Records. Her debut album “The New Classic” was produced by rapper T.I., released in 2014 (as informed by All Star Magazine) and taken up for analysis in this dissertation.

Billboard Magazine has called Azalea’s life an “unlikely crossover success story”, which marks her career as a transracial move. Remarkable of Iggy’s career is her mainstream success despite being a White rapper and... a woman. As mentioned in part 2.1.1 about hip-hop, women generally have a hard time to be taken seriously as rap artists. Add to this Iggy’s ethnicity, and her contemporary popularity could in fact be

²⁶ i.e. Accent.

described as “unlikely”. At the West Coast, where gangsta rap thrived and macho-identities were the norm, women were least likely to contribute to hip-hop music. Dimitriadis (2001: 23) stated that rap producers even “denied opportunities for female access and opened a space for the proliferation of already existing and deeply misogynist cultural discourses”. In over ten years, one could expect these specific conditions to have bettered. Nevertheless, female rappers are faced with authenticity doubts on their behalf. Dreisinger (2008: 117) blames this on women’s “musical chameleon abilities”, which means that women entertainers re-invent themselves more than men on the level of appearances but also style. Therefore, he argues, hip-hop can only remain another “style” for women, whereas it suits as a “lifestyle” for men. Even more questionable is his statement that women can only feature in hip-hop instead of claiming the genre for their own use. African-American female rappers have to fight two battles, against both the negative images hip-hop spreads of them and the historical stereotypes the hegemonic White society potentially maintains (Pough 2004: 97). Moreover, they find themselves faced with a dilemma between their ethnicity and gender. In their music, they have to find a middle ground between their appreciation for the African-American-dominated genre and their self-respect as women (Hagedorn and Davis 2008: 104 - 105). Consequently, one can often see female rappers engage in macho behavior or even male persona. This role-reversal contradicts male standards and helps them to gain recognition in the field (Pough 2004: 86), but it does not help to represent a realistic feminine image either. To see if Azalea crosses into this challenging domain, her use of AAE features is presented next. From her debut album data was gathered from 0:01 until 30:08 for a total of 30.08 minutes.

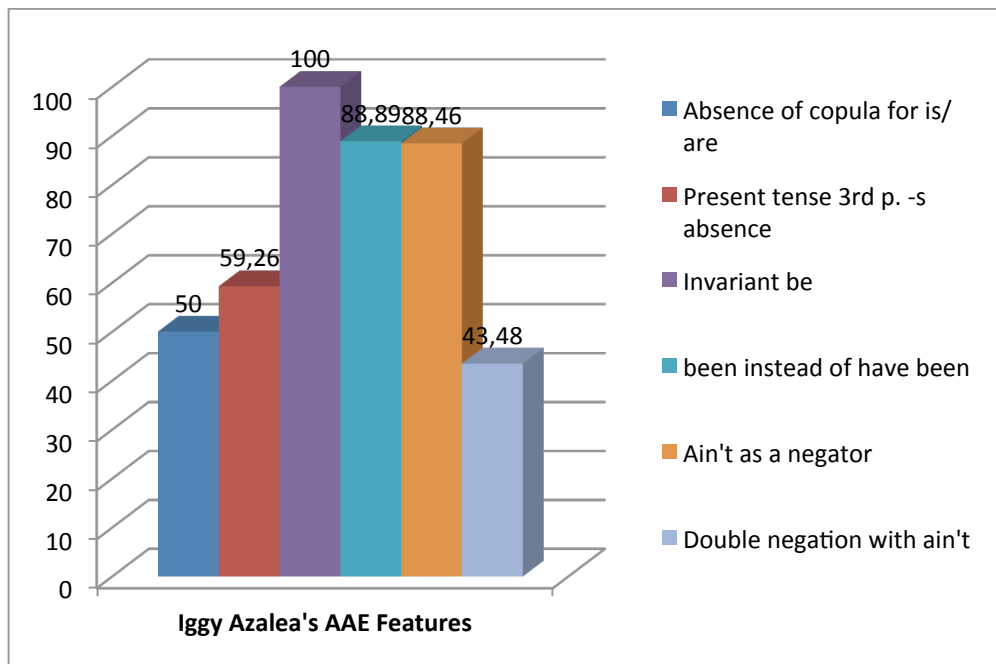


Figure 4. Iggy Azalea’s AAE Features in “The New Classic” (2014)

The overall use of these AAE features is remarkably high for a non-African American and non-American rapper. Azalea employs all of them more than half of the time there is a linguistic opportunity. Her numbers stand in stark contrast to those of Eminem and even AAE’s in-group member J. Cole. She tops Cole for the first two features and even doubles him for the fifth. Iggy Azalea’s case could therefore be described as linguistic appropriation. She can be described as a rapper who produces hip-hop and crosses into an obvious African-American field. By now, one can imagine how that contests the dogma of authenticity to which each hip-hop artist is subjected. In comparison to Eminem, whose presence in hip-hop was tolerated because of his linguistic authenticity, Azalea’s adoption of AAE complicates matters. She told the Guardian of London: “I love the fact that I don’t rap the way I talk; I think it’s completely hilarious and ironic and cool”. Ironic about her speech is that it defies everything hip-hop stands for. In interviews, her “Aussie” accent comes through, but on stage, she raps as if she lived in Atlanta all her life. Although it seems that she is getting away with it, considering her chart-topping songs and increasing fame – the hip-hop community will not embrace Azalea as they eventually did with Eminem. If one enters in the Google search bar “why is Eminem...”, Google completes the sentence with the most common word: “called b rabbit”, “so popular”, “called Eminem”, “the best rapper alive” and “famous”. In Iggy

Azalea's case, "racist" and "problematic" show. Although this is not a scientific poll, it does give an impression of how people perceive Azalea to be different from Eminem. As Alim (2009: 81) points out, a lot of White rappers use AAE, while at the same time adopting a stance that acknowledges their Whiteness. This means that when White rappers use AAE, they should "come out" discursively via their song lyrics. Because of Azalea's general avoidance of these topics, she is deemed inauthentic. Following McLeod's model once more, her whole demeanor fits within the "fake"-category. However, the validity of this model, which was designed according to hip-hop fans' views, has been questioned before. In my opinion, the many contradictions between "real" and "fake" lead to unfair conclusions.

Despite her linguistic inauthenticity, Azalea does employ other strategies to be perceived as authentic. Her right hand man T.I., who was the executive producer of her album, sticks up for her whenever he can. He featured on the album within those 30 minutes, as was the Atlanta-based musical trio Watch the Duck. She is known to have had relationships with African-American rapper A\$AP Rocky and basketball player Nick Young. Like Eminem, she trades race for class and racial injustice for poverty as a legitimate experience of suffering. She refers to financial hardship in for example her song "Work" to remind her audience how she came to the States empty handed. On top of this, she has a tattoo with "Trust Your Struggle" on her forearm as a self-proclaimed confirmation of her right to speak. Azalea also presents herself as the underappreciated black sheep of the hip-hop game. In "Walk the Line" she addresses all the prejudice she faced on her way to the top and how she "walks alone". This goes on in the next song "Don't Need Y'all", which emphasizes that she has only herself to thank for her contemporary success. Other songs circle around themes of luxury, heterosexual courtship and the climb to fame. She remains relatively quiet about her roots, even when at the beginning of the album she says that she never forgot them. Besides mentioning that she's "international" (Walk the Line), "a fly Aussie" (100), spending "summers in Australia" (Change Your Life) and an "immigrant" (Work), Azalea does not seem to engage in a lengthy authenticity discussion. She told Billboard magazine "We get so caught up, especially in rap, with what's authentic, and I wish people would think more about what the fuck that even means [...] One critic was like "why didn't you talk about more Australian things?" I don't understand why I am supposed to write a song about

living in the outback and riding a kangaroo to be authentic”. The attempt of the critic to get Azalea to color within the lines thus failed. Azalea takes on a hip-hop persona that allows her to behave in ways her White female Australian identity would not. Her success overrules the notions of authenticity by which the hip-hop community is able to exert power. Azalea arguably infuriates African-American rappers because she is the one who decides between different identities. African-American talk show host Wendy Williams addressed her audience about this by saying:

Black people don't want this girl to win... because she's White [...] and also cause she's from Australia. See, we here in the country are very territorial about our rap music, you know what I'm saying? You come here, you have an accent, you're White, you hook up with T.I. - one of our rap kings - you take over the radio, you could be heard on hip-hop stations, top 40 stations [...]. In other words, you're a hater because she's crossed over and she's managed to make it.

Williams mentions how Azalea's accent plays a role in the territorial response from the African-American community. It shows how Azalea's crossing violates people's general understanding of race and gender (Babb 1998: 193). Her attitude can paradoxically be described as non-conformist and conformist at the same time. She does not perform according to what hip-hop would expect from her, namely to remain within her linguistic domain, and at the same time violates the order of things by conforming to hip-hop's style in every sense. In this light, Azalea could bring about some change in the genre. For one, she could help to loosen up hip-hop's ethnic absolutism and racial tension. Also, her prominence could inspire women to take part in the music without having to account for it. In “Impossible is Nothing”, Azalea addresses both young girls and boys and promises “to blaze a path and leave a trail for the next”. However, Azalea does not seem to rise to the occasion to fulfill this promise. In her song “New Bitch” her tone seems to echo the misogynistic attitude of a lot of other hip-hop artists. She calls herself someone's new bitch who makes his “old bitch” jealous by spending her boyfriend's cash and dressing herself in expensive clothes. Also, by saying “I'm a boss chick, but he run it”, Azalea assumes a rather subjugated role in a relationship.

Arguably, if she would have criticized the genre via her lyrics, there exists a chance that she would not have achieved the top. There is probably a limit to which lines of convention you can cross. It is remarkable how Azalea's presence in the mainstream in itself suffices to make people question the issue of cultural appropriation.

5.3.4 Classified

Classified was born as Luke Boyd in 1977 in Enfield, Nova Scotia in Canada. He allegedly got the musical gene from his father, who played in a cover band. At the age of 15, Boyd spent his time rapping and refining his rhymes. Billboard reports Boyd's main musical influences to be African-American rap formations such as KRS-One, the Beastie Boys, and Naughty By Nature. In his late teens, Boyd moved to Halifax where he founded HalfLife Records. His first album "Union Dues" was released independently when he was 24. He got noticed by URBNET Records, with whom he made a nationwide distribution deal. After this, Boyd, who was working odd jobs, decided to dedicate himself fulltime to rap. He has been named "the most acclaimed hip-hop artist of Canada", who is partly responsible for putting Canadian rap music on the map. For Boyd, becoming famous was never what mattered. Instead, his priorities are to "get my point across, be honest and make real music" (mtv.com). Today, Boyd still lives 15 minutes from where he was born. In this sense, one would expect the numbers of AAE-features to remain relatively low. The data was gathered from his 14th and self-titled studio album "Classified" from 12:14 till 42:41 for 30.27 minutes of data.

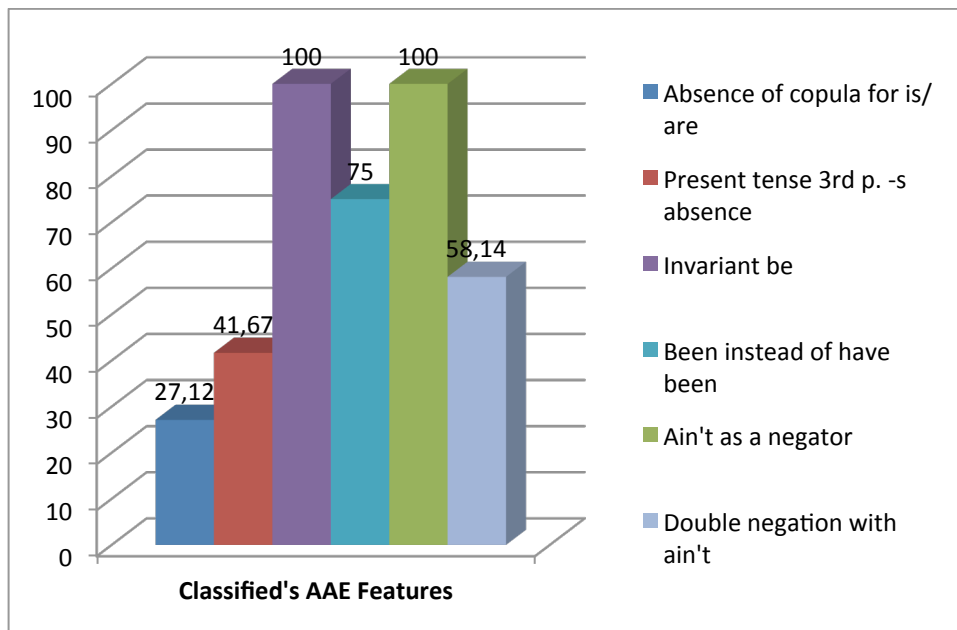


Figure 5. Classified’s AAE Features in “Classified” (2013)

The first two features, of which was decided that they were most typical of AAE, are used less by Classified than by Iggy Azalea, but are still quite high for someone who has lived his entire life in Canada. The invariant *be* and *ain’t* as a negator are used all of the time. Azalea had similar high percentages. One could argue that these two features are most often used by outsiders of African-American culture. Therefore, one could say that these features are more fluid, whereas the first two, absence of copula *be* and third person *-s*, are more firmly marked as African-American speech. Invariant *be* and *ain’t* translated into high percentages for all three White rappers and can be perceived as being part of a rap vocabulary and grammar that is used by Anglophone artists from all over the world. This rap grammar thus entails some salient AAE features that have entered the mainstream and possibly affected non-African Americans’ speech. In his work, Sartwell (1998: 171) also expresses this: “rap has entered much more widely into pop music vocabularies [...] and is more part of the common language out of which pop songs can be made by anyone”.

However, Classified’s performance speech is influenced by other AAE features that are not so commonly used by non-African Americans. For example, Classified used the generalization of *is* and *was* with plural and second person subjects – e.g.: “Who’s your friends” (Growing Pains). Also, *finna* to mark immediate future was used in “I Only Say it Cause it’s True” in a contracted form: “I’m too intelligent to say you *fin* to dumb

me down”. Even though the song “Anything Goes” mentions how the “Nova Scotian” comes out of his mouth, Classified’s linguistic behavior fits the definition of crossing.

Lyrically, Classified tries to create an authentic image of himself. In “Anything Goes” he tells his listeners that he writes and produces everything himself. Together with African-American rappers Raekwon and Kuniva, he asserts his “realness” in “I Only Say it Cause it’s True” by describing how he learnt “the art of rap”. Furthermore, he mentions how he is “a tiger that’s been brought up in a lion’s den”, which possibly refers to his position as a White and Canadian rapper in an African-American music scene and how he had to fight by “burning my stripes, digging my claws in”. The African-American rappers featured on the album also account for Classified’s authenticity. The aforementioned Kuniva ends his rap with “real recognize real / and Class is looking real familiar”. In “Familiar”, Classified quotes from the lyrics of three big names in hip-hop, namely Tupac Shakur, Common, and Jay-Z. One could interpret the recurrent question in the chorus “don’t it sound a bit familiar?” as Classified’s musical familiarity to what fans would call “good hip-hop”. In “Hi-deas”, the topic of hip-hop is referred to again:

I had this hi-dea about rock and roll
And how I think it’s similar to the way that hip hop will grow
They thought it was a fad made by African Americans
And no mother or dad wanted any children hearing ‘em
Hated by the church, they called it devil music
Now these Christian rockbands encourage kids to do it
Time changes everything I see it right now
It ain’t hip-hop or rock and roll, it’s a lifestyle

In Baraka’s opinion, rock and roll has been appropriated by White musicians from African-American culture (see part 3.3.1) Classified does not address the topic in these racialized terms, since that would turn out to lead to a rather awkward position for himself, being White. Instead of coloring the evolution of rock and roll from Black to White, he sees it as having gone from controversial and belonging to a subculture to generally accepted in the mainstream. Classified argues that the same will happen to

hip-hop, in other words, that more and more people will start to take part in it. The song “New School/Old School” deals explicitly with Classified’s relation with hip-hop. Together with African-American rapper KayO Redd, this song takes the shape of a dialogue that compares Classified’s “Old School” ways to the younger KayO, who represents the New School of style in hip-hop. They discuss their clothing style, musical inspirations and way of rapping. Quite striking is that of the four rappers Classified mentions as having influenced him – Juice, Supernatural, Snoop Dogg, and MC Hammer – all are African-American rappers. There seems to be no distinct Canadian hip-hop scene to make mention of. From Classified’s lyrics one gets the impression that there is only one hip-hop culture and its origins are undeniably American. The song ends with Kayo asking: “You from Enfield, what could you possibly know about hip-hop?”, which could be read as subtly questioning of what a White Canadian rapper has to do with the genre.

Besides the high number of African-American rappers that were featured in those 30 minutes, it was obvious how Classified claimed personal authenticity via his lyrics. For one, he displayed his knowledge of hip-hop’s roots and most important rap artists. Secondly, he emphasized his work ethic and how he comes up with his own ideas and rhymes. Classified clearly moves within a frame of American hip-hop and shows awareness of this. As a result, his speech is heavily influenced by AAE, which is considered to be a case of linguistic appropriation. His behavior is different from Iggy Azalea’s because he does “out” himself as a Canadian. One can assume that the conversation between him and KayO in “Old School/New School” was very consciously designed to mention Classified’s nationality, even just briefly. Furthermore, the cover of the album “Classified” displays the same dragon that is on the flag of Nova Scotia. In a song called “Oh, Canada” he celebrates being Canadian and brings homage to his home country. This gives the impression that he is comfortable with his origins and with representing this in his music. According to Alim (2009: 81) this was a requirement to counter the linguistic appropriation and still be respected. Because Classified still represents Canada within the American discourse, the hip-hop audience seems to appreciate him more than Azalea. Also, Classified’s gender as a male who dresses according to the typical urban style, i.e. for example baggy clothes, enables him to embody a “hip-hopper” with greater ease.

McLeod's parameters applied to Classified become complicated by his speech. In a way, he is staying true to himself because he talks about his nationality openly. However, the variety of English he chooses to use is clearly AAE. Next, in "Wicked" he comments on the political-economic topic that he "ain't commercial or underground". His music is popular in Canada and the U.S., but unlike Eminem and Iggy Azalea, his music has not hit the radio and music charts in Belgium. It is clear that he resists the mainstream in his song "Hi-deas" when he raps: "Following the formula, is that what you stand for? / How come all these douche bags keep running the dance floor?". Secondly, in "Wicked" he says: "I ain't no thrift shop rapper, nothing go on resale", which refers to White mainstream rapper Macklemore's first big hit "Thrift Shop". This could be read as another instance when Classified dismisses the mainstream. On a gender-sexual level, Classified could be perceived as rather soft than hard. In "Growing Pains", the rapper talks about raising his two daughters and contemplates if he is a good example for them. He shows awareness of the hypocrisy that being a father and a rapper can bring about. This is most apparent in "Hi-Deas", when he describes prohibiting his daughters from going to parties, while he raps about smoking marijuana a few lines later. Classified's speech stands out because he swears the least of all four selected rappers. For one, he does not use the word "bitch" to talk about women. In comparison, J. Cole brings it up nine times, even referring to an inanimate object as "bitch" once. Eminem, who is known for his "nightmarish mouth"²⁷ says it 20 times in half an hour, and Iggy Azalea uses it 14 times in total, including eight times to refer to herself. Finally, the 30 minutes of Classified's data did not give the impression of him pursuing a "street" image. This places Classified somewhere between "real" and "fake" according to McLeod, and arguably similarly between Eminem and Iggy Azalea's position in hip-hop.

5.3.5 Summary

In conclusion, a final graph was made to show the average use of AAE by each rapper. The percentages of each feature were counted together and put into a new number.

²⁷ Eminem is known for his high use of profanity and says in the song "Evil Twin" of the album, "From the first album even the gals were like / "tight lyrics, dreamy eyes" / but my fucking mouth was nightmare-ish".

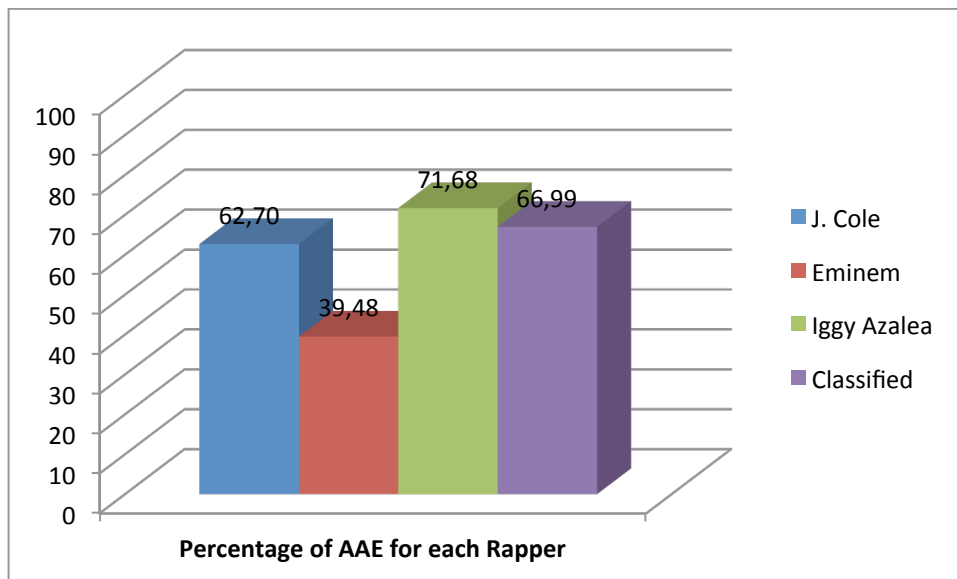


Figure 6. Average Percentage of AAE Features for each Rapper.

Eminem, as the first important White rapper to become internationally successful, uses the variety the least of all. Knowing that he had the linguistic set to his dispersal as an inhabitant in the predominantly African-American populated Detroit, his results are rather surprising. It is suggested that his low AAE features in combination with the lyrical acknowledgement of his Whiteness have enhanced his authenticity which led to his acceptance by the hip-hop community. As an American, it is possible that Eminem was more sensitive to the White/Black-dynamics and debate surrounding cultural appropriation, which could have motivated his “neutral” linguistic behavior.

Most striking is Iggy Azalea’s average number, which stands out with 71,68 percent, encompassing African-American in-group member J. Cole. Her linguistic appropriation combined with her gender complicates her place in a male dominated and African-American centered genre that revolves around authenticity. In this sense, her high percentage could also be interpreted as a linguistic compensation for other typical characteristics that she lacks – i.e. being male and preferably African American. Although it is uncommon for White non-American women to become successful rappers, Azalea has managed to do so. Her speech associates herself very clearly with the genre. The exceptional use of AAE marks her music as rap, not as pop, and helps establish her name as a rapper.

Classified and J. Cole’s numbers are quite close to each other. This proves that Classified uses AAE as much as an African-American member of hip-hop. His

linguistic behavior emphasized his respect for hip-hop as an African-American genre. Via his speech he affiliated with African-Americans, which his choice of featured artists and themes in his album were also proof of.

Finally, J. Cole's numbers show how he uses AAE more than half of the time he had the opportunity to use it, but not as much as one would expect. This proves Rickford's (1999: 9) assumption that in-group members do not use the variety that is generally associated with them all the time. Out of tertiary material found on the internet, especially comprised of opinions coming from an American audience, it was clear that J. Cole and Eminem are most appreciated within the genre, that Classified is not in the same league as these two but still has a large fan base, and Iggy Azalea is under a ton of negative scrutiny for her role as a rapper.

6 Conclusion

Over a time span of about 45 years, hip-hop has moved from the disadvantaged neighborhoods and streets of New York to radio stations and living rooms all over the world. Initially an obscure subculture, it has transformed into a global phenomenon. Its underground, anarchic allure has been repackaged and sold to the mainstream. White rappers have entered the scene and taken the mic. This dissertation has proven that these performers face a lot of dilemmas when they try to meet up to hip-hop's authenticity standards. Moreover, "two indispensable aspects of the form – its blackness and its youthful maleness – seem to occasion a refusal of general, serious, nuanced recognition" (Baker 1993: 62). In general, White rappers have to make a lot of effort to become embraced by the African-American hip-hop community. The latter tend to perceive the White rapper's participation as cultural appropriation and "stealing". It was suggested that instead, linguistic appropriation and crossing were most suitable to describe the cross-racial behavior for the three White rappers that were selected. African-American English is interpreted as an ethnically marked variety of English and its use by non-African Americans confirms hip-hop's roots to be in the Bronx, New York.

The White rappers of this work have all used strategies to enhance their personal authenticity, since provenance authenticity could not be obtained. American rapper Eminem, the pioneer of White hip-hop, is accepted and acknowledged by the hip-hop community. He has surpassed many of his African-American counterparts in terms of recognition, fame, and financial success. This was mainly because he claimed authenticity by claiming his Whiteness. Moreover, Eminem did not resort to AAE too much in his performance speech. He did not pretend to represent African-American culture and therefore, did not spark that much anxiety. On the other hand, the Australian-born Iggy Azalea is subject to scorn and ridicule on the regular. Because she does not account for her Whiteness within the genre and her linguistic appropriation is obvious, one could say that she does pose a threat to the African-American community. On the radio, one might take Azalea for an in-group member of the African-American community because of her speech. Likewise, her femininity poses a problem of authenticity for the male-dominated genre. Azalea has two battles to fight, namely on a

racial and gender level. Then there is the Canadian rapper Classified, whose position is somewhere in between the two. He also crosses into AAE when he raps but he does own up to his Whiteness. He is not one of the big players in the rap market, but is nevertheless respected by his Canadian fan base.

Out of all the levels of authenticity that were discussed, together with different dimensions, ethnicity as a category of identity clearly prevails. J. Cole's personal history was not convincing enough to embody a true "hip-hopper", yet his position in the genre would rarely be questioned. Therefore, one can say that hip-hop's principles can be compared to ethnic absolutism. It has been pointed out already, that authenticity within hip-hop serves to hold on to a distinct African-American culture. In that sense, authenticity itself can be interpreted as a strategy. It succeeds in keeping non-African Americans out by labelling them as inauthentic. Authenticity as a concept "emphasizes fixity over continuous social construction and disguises subjectivity as objectivity for the purpose of evaluating cultural products" (Jeffries 2011: 136). It is fascinating to think how the dogma of authenticity has hampered hip-hop's development to include more than one generic identity – i.e. African-American male. One could ask if hanging on to authenticity even makes sense anymore in such a "globalized, hybridized world that has deconstructed and exploded notions of authentic essences and absolute differences?" (Cheng 2004: 3). For the African-American hip-hop community, whose apprehension towards cross-racial performances stems from a history of White appropriation of African-American music, authenticity clearly does hold value.

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8 Appendix

a. Illustrations of Hip-hop and Rap Music

Next, excerpts of songs by two African-American rappers and two non-African-American rappers are given. First, Kendrick Lamar and Common's songs suit as examples of rap that can be interpreted as hip-hop music with its roots firmly planted into hip-hop culture. The emphasis in all of the excerpts is on the social injustice and struggles African Americans have faced in the past as well as today. These artists take to rap to utter feelings of protest in a creative way, which is what hip-hop was initially built for. The afrocentrism²⁸ obvious in hip-hop culture is also the main influence on these songs. Secondly, this part will introduce two non-African-American rappers and show how their rap music has sociopolitical potential as well.

I'm African-American, I'm African
I'm black as the moon, heritage of a small village
Pardon my residence
Came from the bottom of mankind
My hair is nappy, my dick is big, my nose is round and wide
You hate my people, your plan is to terminate my culture
You're fucking evil, I want you to recognize that I'm a proud monkey
You vandalize my perception but can't take style from me
And this is more than confession
I mean I might press the button so you know my discretion
I'm guardin' my feelings, I know that you feel it
You sabotage my community, makin' a killin'
You made me a killer, emancipation of a real nigga

²⁸ Afrocentrism is a position that postulates that a knowledge of African(-American) history and culture is crucial for the betterment of African Americans' self-esteem in the U.S. (Rhea 1997: 104). A famous African-American civil rights activist who advocated the views of afrocentrism was Malcolm X.

This song by Kendrick Lamar, called “The Blacker the Berry” shares its name with a novel written during the Harlem Renaissance²⁹ by Wallace Thurman in 1928. The protagonist of this story, named Emma Lou, minds “being too black” (1) and introduces the reader to her life, struggling against racial prejudice from Whites as well as lighter-skinned African Americans. Thurman indicates that his title in turn is taken from the Negro folk saying “the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice”, which becomes the hook³⁰ of Lamar’s song. So far, two important intertextual references to African-American heritage are made in the title itself. Also, the song is the 13th track on the album. This could be interpreted as a reference to the 13th Amendment of the American Constitution which abolished slavery. Next, in the bridge³¹, a riot scene is invoked that reminds one of what took place in Ferguson, Missouri in the summer of 2014³². In the first verse, references to his African heritage, to African American’s low socio-economic status and their general racial features are brought up. In the hook, the Jamaican artist “Assassin” is featured. Assassin’s appearance on a militant song like this marks his inclusiveness in the problematic racial issues that are expressed. It also acknowledges Jamaican influence on early hip-hop and their shared past of slavery. Aside from this, South-African tribal warfare, gangs in Compton, California, the activist group “the Black Panthers”, civil rights activist Marcus Garvey, February as Black History Month³³, the murder of teenager Trayvon Martin³⁴, and so on are mentioned. In times of racial injustice, rappers almost feel obliged to speak out. Osumare (2007: 33-34), Lüthe (2008: 72) and Cobb (2007: 14-16) perceive the rapper as a modern preacher, in his way of speaking and also in the way a community respects him and pays attention to what he says.

²⁹ The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was a time in which “the Negro was in vogue” and which marked the “first significant literary and cultural movement in African-American history” (Hutchinson 2007: 28). During this time, cultural expressions concerning the Black experience were in unprecedented high demand.

³⁰ “The hook is a phrase or a word that literally hooks, or grabs, the listener and draws them into the song. The hook is often in the chorus or refrain” (Davidson and Heartwood: 7).

³¹ “The bridge is a device that is used to break up the repetitive pattern of a song and keep the listeners attention. [...] In a bridge, the pattern of the words and the music change.” (Davidson and Heartwood: 7).

³² Massive protest erupted in Ferguson after an unarmed teenager called Michael Brown was killed by a White police man.

³³ Black History Month “gives blacks a chance to look back at the achievements of their distant and recent ancestors. [...] it is the first intellectual challenge to the centuries of misinformation about Africa and its inhabitants” (Brown 1999: 14).

³⁴ On February 26th, 2012, George Zimmerman fatally shot 17-year old Trayvon Martin after receiving a complaint about a “suspicious person” in the neighborhood of Sanford, Florida, as reported by Cnn.com.

Thirdly, rapper Common collaborated with singer John Legend for the soundtrack of “Selma”, a biographic movie of the life of Martin Luther King. The movie zooms in on the time around 1965 with the protest marches from the city of Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, which had the objective of obtaining voting rights for all. Despite the 15th Amendment of the American Constitution, which granted every male citizen the right to vote since 1869, African-Americans were constantly discouraged and even boycotted to do so. Just as the song, called “Glory”, the overall tone of the movie is optimistic and proud despite the mental sufferings African Americans have had to bear.

Sins that go against our skin become blessings
The movement is a rhythm to us
Freedom is like religion to us
Justice is juxtaposition in’ us
Justice for all just ain’t specific enough
One son died, his spirit is revisitin’ us
True and livin’ livin’ in us, resistance is us
That’s why Rosa sat on the bus
That’s why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up
When it go down we woman and man up
They say “stay down” and we stand up
Shots, we on the ground, the camera panned up
King pointed to the mountain top and we ran up

Common’s speech is marked by features of African-American English in for example the use of *ain’t*, the absence of third person *-s* in “it go” and the absence of copula *be* in “we on the ground”. The song shows that the hardship African Americans went through during the 1960s has not ceased in the post-civil rights era. Namely, “One son died” can refer both to the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson in Selma³⁵ as well as to aforementioned victims of police violence Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and the more recent cases of

³⁵ Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot in Selma by White men when he tried to defend his mother in a café (Vaughn 2006: 49) According to Vaughn, his death was an important if not crucial impulse for the Selma to Montgomery March (54).

Eric Garner³⁶, Eric Harris³⁷ and many more. A mentioning of Rosa Parks, the woman who refused to sit in the Black section of a bus in 1955, is directly followed by a reference to recent protest in Ferguson. In this way, the past and the present become inextricably linked to each other. The message that Common spreads through his song is one of resistance to oppression. The movie “Selma” reminds young frustrated African Americans that violence is not the answer, but peaceful protest like Martin Luther King’s can make a world of difference. In a time when racial tension rises, these kinds of messages can influence and help appease frustrated crowds.

Next, two excerpts of non-African-American rappers are discussed. The American Macklemore and British Plan B both turn to rap to voice their opinions on urgent social issues that happen on a broad, more global level. First of all, Macklemore’s song called “Same Love” has made waves across America and beyond. As one of the first mainstream rappers, his hit song tackles prejudices against homosexuality and advocates equal rights regarding marriage. With “Same Love”, Macklemore has contributed immensely to the debate and stimulation of tolerance of homosexuals, especially among young people. Taken out of the African-American context that focuses mostly on racial issues, Macklemore shows that rap can form an outlet for other kinds of political protest as well. Moreover, in the first line of the excerpt, he even criticizes hip-hop for its often harsh and conservative attitude towards homosexuality. In the second part of the excerpt, Macklemore addresses the institution of the church as gay marriage’s main opponent.

If I was gay, I would think hip-hop hates me
Have you read the YouTube comments lately?
“Man, that’s gay” gets dropped on the daily
We’ve become so numb to what we’re saying
[...]
Live on! And be yourself
When I was in church they taught me something else

³⁶ 43-year old Eric Garner died as the result of a chokehold by police officers on the 17th of July in 2014. On a video that went viral, Garner repeatedly says: “I can’t breathe”. This phrase becomes iconic in the protests that ensue. The NYPD officer responsible for Garner’s death was not indicted, as reported by Cnn.com.

³⁷ On April the 2nd in Tulsa, Oklahoma Reserve Deputy Robert Bates “inadvertently” killed Eric Harris by using his gun instead of his Taser, as reported by Cnn.com.

If you preach hate at the service, those words aren't anointed
That Holy Water that you soak in has been poisoned
When everyone else is more comfortable remaining voiceless
Rather than fighting for humans that have had their rights stolen
I might not be the same, but that's not important
No freedom till we're equal, damn right I support it

Finally, before Plan B will be addressed, a brief comparison between punk and hip-hop can be made. In the UK, rap music seems to have taken over the society-critical role of punk, which was especially popular in 1970s and 1980s. Punk is often described to have political lyrics, and is characterized by an anti-authoritarian attitude. Using this description, punk actually seems to have a lot in common with hip-hop, minus the racial aspect. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher as prime minister decided to go on with the Falklands War and with the closure of the coalmines. These events were under a lot of scrutiny in punk music. The best known protest songs concerning these events were “How Does It Feel” of a band called Crass with its striking lyrics: “We never asked for war / nor in the struggle to realisation did we feel there was a need for it [...] / How does it feel to be the mother of a thousand dead?”. Also the titles of “Stand Down Margaret” by the English Beat and the Smith’s “Margaret on the Guillotine” say enough about punk’s general estimation of the “Iron Lady”. Today, rap music seems to have become a new medium through which similar worries and complaints are expressed. Plan B uttered criticism in his album *Ill Manors* (2012) on the UK government, mentioning for example the riots in Tottenham that occurred in August 2011. These series of riots were carried out by protesters after the killing of Mark Duggan, who was shot by the police³⁸. In the music video of the song “Ill Manors”, Plan B can be seen rioting along, which he allegedly did to satirize what had happened in London (Ben Drew 2012). The protest against the Tottenham incident and class-differences in general are the main themes of the song. He raps: “We’ve had it with you politicians / you bloody rich kids never listen / there’s no such thing as broken Britain / we’re just bloody broke in Britain / what needs fixing is the system, not shop windows down in Brixton.” Another song by Plan

³⁸ 29-year old Mark Duggan was an alleged member of the Tottenham Man Dem Gang, one of the most notorious street gangs in Britain. On the 4th of August 2011, he was suspected of carrying an illegal fire arm and was shot twice in north London, after which he died. As reported by The Guardian.

What is worth addressing is “Playing With Fire”. This song deals with the struggles of a young boy named Jake, who forms an example of an entire young generation of British kids dealing with gangs, drugs, sex and crime. The second verse of the song ends with these same words: “Now he’s just another poster boy, for David Cameron’s Broken Britain”. This ‘broken Britain’ refers to the term the Conservative Party frequently uses to describe the social decay and increase of violence in the UK (as reported by The Guardian 2010). Thus, whereas former prime minister Margaret Thatcher received hard blows from punkers, current prime minister David Cameron’s politics are questioned by rappers. Today’s youth in Britain have not become less politically engaged, they have merely changed their style of protest.

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b. Gangsta Rap

As if the confusion surrounding rap and hip-hop did not suffice, rap and gangsta rap are also often falsely taken to be the same thing. Gangsta rap is a subgenre of rap appears to be the its prominent and contested form. This part discusses the origins and zooms in on the prejudice gangsta rap has dealt with in the past, which remains valid for today. In a reasonable fashion, some of gangsta rap's flaws will be exposed and interpreted. First, some background information about gangsta rap as a subgenre of rap is given next.

The crises in the industrial sector in the 1970s left a lot of Americans, of which a great number of African Americans workers, unemployed and demoralized. In the 1980s, American president Ronald Reagan introduced his "Reaganomics", which stopped for a great part the social spending programs. Subsequently, "Public spaces where African Americans spent a lot of time gradually transformed into drug economies" (Dyson 1996: 177). Economic frustrations created feelings of nihilism which became expressed in "gangsta rap". This subgenre of rap boomed commercially from the mid-1990s onwards (Morgan 2009: 3). The central themes of gangsta rap are the "criminalization, surveillance, incarceration, and poverty of black youth in the postindustrial city" (Hagedorn and Davis 2008: 100). The style is often described by the media as vulgar, violent and impertinently commercial.

Even though gangsta rappers claim that they illustrate life in the streets as they experience it, conservative parents and politicians like former senator Bob Dole and Tipper Gore – the wife of former vice-president Al Gore - were not interested in sociological lessons from "thugs³⁹". As a means of maintaining order censoring "wars" were declared. The result of this was for example the use of stickers on album covers saying "Parental Advisory" and "clean" CD versions with the profanity bleeped out. The polarizing debates directed towards gangsta rap often concluded that all hip-hop music and its themes of violence, sex and drugs were a bad influence on children and teenagers. In this way, gangsta rap became the rock 'n roll of the new era. In terms of

³⁹ A "thug" is a condescending alternative for a gangster. It refers mostly to males who are "wannabe" gangsters or who fail to live the lifestyle credibly.

controversy, gangsta rap can be perceived as a replacement of this older musical expression because

in the past thirty years, rock and roll has slowly faded away as the sound of teenage rebellion in America. Integrated into the system of mainstream culture by the aging Baby Boomers that drove its innovative 1960s phase, rock and roll has lost its outlaw edge [...] The majority of rock bands and rappers today, from Good Charlotte and P.O.D. to Ludacris and 50 Cent, act like rebels of society (Bozza 2003: 152).

Moreover, according to William Eric Perkins, a hip-hop scholar, rap in general “can claim a place alongside gospel, music, work songs, jazz, and rhythm and blues in the African cultural unconscious” (Osumare 2007: 23). Potter (1995) adds to this an interpretation of blues as the “classical” African-American musical form, followed by “modernist” jazz and succeeded nowadays by rap, which he describes as being “postmodern” (13-18). Also Hagedorn and Davis (2008: 97) give gangsta rap a place in the African-American cultural tradition. More specifically, they find that the rage and defiance towards the White man expressed in gangsta rap “had also found its outlet in blues or writing of for example Toni Morrison”. Besides their shared form of being “testimony for the underclass” (98), it seems problematic for Toni Morrison’s highly regarded literary novels and gangsta rap to be that easily compared.

From a realistic perspective, one can concede that within the subgenre of gangsta rap, quality does not always conquer quantity. Quite often, a lot of originality and integrity one could perceive as being intrinsic to hip-hop gets lost in the pointless hedonism and misogyny one can find within this subgenre. African-American political scientist Martin Kilson voiced the following critique: “The “hip-hop worldview” is far from being a viable post-civil rights era message to African-American children and youth. It is seldom a message of self-respect and self-dignity” (Jeffries 2011: 11). He goes on to call hip-hop performers – by which he is making a generalization - materialistic, nihilistic and even sadistic. One can imagine that Kilson is referring to gangsta rap in particular here. Apparently, these elements do attract a large fan base since gangsta rap records remain popular. Rap mogul and producer Russell Simmons

confirms this tendency: “I don’t like the trend toward so many gangster records in rap, but I am an art dealer and that’s what’s selling now” (Hagedorn & Davis 2008: 98). According to some, the success of gangsta rap has more to do with the bad taste of a large part of the consumers than it actually represents the true nature of African-American hip-hop culture. But not all blame should be put on the young consumers. The music industry - this goes for pop, hip-hop, rock, and any style which hosts record labels and touring artists – has always been a commercial business. But especially in hip-hop and gangsta rap, the paradox of authenticity and commercialism is most apparent. For this second paradox within hip-hop, it is striking how gangsta rappers commercialize and commodify their “authentic” image of struggling on the streets. This image could be true at an initial stage of their careers. The moment these rappers start to connect with bigger crowds, consisting of people who possibly share their difficult experiences, they fail to fully represent that lifestyle anymore because they are part of a corporate gangsta rap business.

Commercialization is in the nature of pretty much all performance art. On top of that, not everybody occupies him- or herself intensively with hip-hop – or music in general - looking for alternatives to gangsta rap and exploring the other types of rap. A lot of teenagers just “go with the flow” of what is aired on the radio. It is attested that Sony Music Entertainment, Electric & Musical Industries, Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group control over 86 percent of the music market in the U.S. since 2007. This means that “decisions regarding musical selection rest with a smaller group of program directors than ever before, and the same playlist is distributed to hundreds of outlets throughout the country, so hip hop radio sounds extremely similar no matter which city it is based in.” (Jeffries 2011: 3). Barry Brummett, another hip-hop scholar, even claims that the popularity of gangsta rap is maintained by Whites’ desire to live out racist fantasies (2006: 247), for example by singing along the n-word. Moreover, “Gangsta rap’s booming popularity, constant play and erotic, money worshipping music video’s reinforce racist stereotypes among whites” (Hagedorn and Davis 2008: 93). The overall presence combined with the controversy that surrounds the genre, leaves outsiders who do not usually get into contact with African-American culture to believe that gangsta rap is all rap music has to offer. It is therefore important to stress that gangsta rap is only one type of rap. De Prez (2014: 14-15) differentiates between party

rap, conscious rap, personal rap and joke rap. Thus, focusing on gangsta rap while ignoring the rest of hip-hop's musical productions leads to false conclusions and unfairly reinforces misconceptions of individuals who are already biased towards African-American music.

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c. Passing

To counter the atmosphere of ethnic absolutism that some of the quotes or principles of hip-hop thus far may have created, this chapter is meant to show how race cannot always be interpreted as a fixed category of one's identity. To start off, an introduction to the phenomenon will be given. After this, a digression into literature will be made in parts 1.1 and 1.2, which will deal respectively with Black-to-White and White-to-Black passing. It will become clear that the motivations of a Black man walking in a White man's shoes and vice versa are mostly vary in nature. Part 1.2.1 will give relevant examples of White musicians who have passed as Black in music styles like blues and jazz. This proves that the White rapper is not the first figure to potentially cross-over in African-American music. Finally, reflections on these phenomena in relation to the White rapper in 1.3.

1 What is Passing?

Besides cultural appropriation, the practice of "passing" will be now be considered as another possibility to describe the behavior of the White artist. Passing stands for "the ability to be taken for a member of a social category other than one's own" (Bucholtz 1995: 351). Passing is a manifestation of what Michael Awkward called "transraciality", which can be similarly defined as "a radical revision of one's natural markings and the adoption of aspects of the human surface (especially skin, hair, and facial features) generally associated with the racial other." (Awkward 1995: 180). This means that changes on a superficial level could suffice to become the Other. Gayatri Spivak, an Indian literary theorist and philosopher, called this an instance of "chromatism", meaning the "reduction of race to visible differences in skin color" (Dreisinger 2008: 62).

Passing is related to cultural appropriation because it similarly designates a move across ethnic and cultural boundaries. The main difference is that with cultural appropriation, the White artist remains White after having appropriated. He or she takes

something from a culture, but never is mistaken as a member of that particular culture. Deliberate passing, on the other hand, marks a complete shift of being. Hypothetically speaking, if the White artist would disguise him- or herself as an African-American and would enter the hip-hop scene without getting exposed, he or she has successfully passed. For people who have a mixed ethnic background, passing could be part of their everyday routine. As Bucholtz explains: “passing is the active construction of how the self is perceived when one’s ethnicity is ambiguous to others”. This form of passing, depending on how others perceive a certain individual, is often undeliberate. It can be momentarily and even amusing, whereas deliberately passing for people without mixed ethnicity is a transformative process accompanied by potential psychological hardship.

In opposition to ethnic studies, in which passing is viewed negatively, queer and feminist studies see potential this phenomenon. Bucholtz explains: “The subversive appeal of queer identities lies precisely in their ability to be disguised. Metaphors of theater, parody and drag permeate postmodern feminist writing.” (352). She points out that gender theorists see passing as an achievement, as a self-determining action of individuals who reject society’s imposed gender identities. Ethnic studies usually perceive it as an evasion of racism that is only available to a limited amount of people, namely people with mixed heritage who could easily be mistaken to belong to one race or another. On top of that, ethnic passing is always connected to a certain ideology which entails racism as well as sexism.

In order to understand this phenomenon, its historical developments and political implications will be discussed next. Moreover, examples from literature will be given to explore the relationship between the races of White and Black.

1.1 Black-to-White Passing

A benefit and a disadvantage of looking white is that most people treat you as though you were white. And so, because of how you’ve been treated, you come to expect this sort of treatment... falsely supposing that you’re treated this way because people think you are a valuable person. So, for example, you come to expect a certain level of respect, a certain degree of attention to your voice and your opinions, certain liberties of action and self-expression

to which you falsely supposed yourself to be entitled because your voice, your opinion, and your conduct are valuable in themselves. (Piper 1996: 298)

This quote by Adrian Piper, an American philosopher, articulates in a sarcastic way some of the advantages of Black-to-White passing in a hegemonic White society. She offers a critique on the behavior of White people who perceive their ethnicity to be superior compared to others. The quote also exposes the typical self-entitled behavior, one which is based on privilege that has been acquired unfairly. Black-to-White passing could be pursued to defy the “pattern of white racial domination and economic exploitation” (Wald 2000: 9) that African Americans had to go through during times of slavery. At this particular point in history, Black-to-White passing happened as to escape from becoming a slave. The story called “Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom” about Ellen and William Craft, situated in 1848 and published in 1860, is an example of this. Ellen’s race was ambiguous since she was born to an African-American slave mother and a White father. She pretended to be a White man who was accompanied by his slave, William, on “his” travel from the South to the North (Dawkins 2012: 31-54). Another famous instance of passing happened in 1892, when a man called Homer Plessy pretended to be White in an attempt to get on a train that was reserved for Whites. He managed to get on board but was exposed as a Black man before he could get off. Upon his arrest he consulted several attorneys who brought the case “Plessy v. Ferguson” before the U.S. Supreme Court four years later. The attorneys and Plessy hoped to dismantle the dominant racial categories, but instead lost the case. As a consequence, segregation was institutionalized and justified by the “one-drop rule”. This meant that even though Plessy could pass as White, having a single drop of Black blood in his ancestry sufficed to become classified as Black. This led to great confusion for people who did not know the details of their family history. So for example, a woman named Susie Guillory Phipps, who lived her entire life in Louisiana believing that she was a White woman - married to a White man -, was denied a “White” passport. Unknowingly, her birth certificate described her as “colored”. In 1970, a lawsuit decided that Phipps was indeed Black because she had more than 1/32 Black ancestry, which was the measure dictated by the one-drop rule. For Phipps’s

family history, this meant that the court counted back until 1770, when her great great great grandfather took a Black slave as his mistress⁴⁰ (Bird 2009: 14), bearing Colored offspring that faded into White again by the 20th century, in which they were still classified as being Black.

Black-to-White passing marks an instance in which the “double consciousness” of African Americans becomes most obvious. In “The Souls of Black Folk” (published first in 1903), W.E.B. Du Bois explains the implications of having double consciousness:

From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American [...] from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. [...] Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals (133).

Black-to-White passing really embodies living a double life. Double consciousness means having critical insight in the White hegemonic lifestyle that African Americans have to adjust and subjugate to. Strengthening the notion of double thoughts was the fact that the remembrance of America’s abusive past was limited to Black communities. It was only after the 1960s that museums of Black history were created (Rhea 1997: 97) and that Whites gained more understanding of their past. White-to-Black passing cannot be taken as an instance of double consciousness, since Whites have never been put in the position of the Other. Being a member of a majority culture that dominates society, a lot of Whites assume they represent the norm from which other ethnicities differ. A lot of White Americans fail to acknowledge that they ethnically marked themselves (Brummett 2006: 239; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998: 18).

In the subsequent era with Jim Crow laws, Black-to-White passers could disobey segregation rules and could avoid having to sit in the less comfortable places in the bus, train or restaurant. It allowed one to make a move of upward social mobility and become a “respectable member” of the hegemonic White society. When the segregation

⁴⁰ The state of Louisiana abolished this rule in 1983.

laws were suspended, the practice of passing was getting less popular with African Americans. Doris Black argued that the “trajectory of racial passing in the post-civil rights era is that increasingly the only passing of note will be “passing for black” (Wald 2000: 23), a statement which this dissertation reinforces.

African Americans constitute 12 percent of America’s population (Verney 2003: 110) and can therefore be called a minority. Thus, Black passing involves a move from the margin to the center and is often “casted as a form of racial disloyalty and ideological entrapment” (Wald 2000: 16). This is because when a Black man passes for White to gain economic advantages, he does so while rejecting the Black community. White passing, on the other hand, marks a move in the opposite way and is “elevated to the status of an educative and ennobling enterprise.” (Wald 2000: 16).

1.2 White-to-Black passing

Since the White artist crosses alleged cultural and ethnic boundaries into an African-American dominated field of music, White-to-Black passing could be up for discussion to examine the White artist’s behavior. In literature, Chestnut, again, tackles the topic in “The Conjure Woman and Other Tales” (1899), of which the short story “Mars Jeems’s Nightmare” deals with a plantation owner who wakes up as a Black slave. Even when Jeems returns to his original state again in the end, he cannot shake feelings of identification with the Black man. In the 19th century, White passing was commonly associated with nightmares and expressed the White man’s fear towards the Black man and the idea of miscegenation (Bucholtz 1995: 359).

Another example in literature of White passing is John Griffin’s “Black Like Me” (1961), in which he describes his personal journey across the U.S. disguised as an African American. On the second page of his book, Griffin explains his actions:

For years the idea had haunted me, and that night it returned more insistently than ever. If a white man became a Negro in the Deep South, what adjustments would he have to make? What is it like to experience discrimination based on skin color, something over which one has no control? [...] How else by becoming a Negro could a white man hope to

learn the truth? Though we lived side by side throughout the South, communication between the two races had simply ceased to exist. Neither really knew what went on with those of the other race (2).

The way Griffin articulates this surely gives his plan the air of an “educative and ennobling enterprise” as Gayle Wald called it. In 1969, “Black Like Me” inspired a White woman named Grace Halsell to undertake a similar experiment. In order to pass, she started sunbathing extensively and used medicine to darken her skin (Ware 2002: 69). She then worked and lived in Harlem for six months and recounted her experiences as an “African-American woman” in her book “Soul Sister”. Whereas Griffin and Halsell’s accounts of passing contain political undertones by trying to fight racism, the purpose of white passing might just as well happen purely for entertainment. Langston Hughes, who is often considered as the father of the Harlem Renaissance, illustrated this in his short story titled “Who’s Passing for Who?” (first published in 1956). He describes an evening in which he and his African-American “bohemian” friends went dining with a White couple. At a certain point, the topic of speech shifts to “passing”, including a mentioning of Nella Larson – famous for her novel “Passing” - and “The Ex-Colored Man”. The White couple then reveals that they are actually Coloreds passing for White. As a result, Langston and his Black friends’ attitudes change from initially trying to impress the White couple, to familiarizing with the two as friends. “All at once we dropped our professionally self-conscious "Negro" manners, became natural, ate fish, and talked and kidded freely like colored folks do when there are no white folks around” (166). After a long night out, the couple finally confesses that actually they are White and have pretended to be fair-skinned Coloreds for the past hours. In other words, their Black-to-White passing turned out to be White-to-Black passing. Besides the amusing nature of White-to-Black passing, this anecdote also shows the fluidity of the racial categories. Another instance of White-to-Black passing in entertainment settings will be exemplified in the next part which deals with music.

1.2.1 White Passing in African-American Music

White passing in 20th century took on a different tone. As discussed in the previous chapter about “style appropriation”, the African-American cultural scene stirred fascination and appreciation in White people. The 1920s marked a time when the Harlem Renaissance captured the interest of Whites. Dreisinger (2008: 50) elaborates: “whites rushed up to Harlem to taste black culture for themselves. In the context of such romanticized journeys, it makes perfect sense that what once sparked anxiety – the notion of white passing for black – suddenly became tinged with fantasy”. Discussed next are two White men who passed for Black, namely Mezz Mezzrow and Johnny Otis.

Mezzrow and Otis cross-identified in a way that suggests their self-conscious appreciation of the African American musical aesthetic. Their passing, then, was more than skin deep. It reflected a depth of understanding about the fact that the essence of African American culture – the aesthetics of improvisation and “coolness”, the ability to [...] “make life swing” – was distilled in African American music. For these men, to truly feel and play black music was, on a profound level, to truly feel black. (96-97).

Mezz Mezzrow, a clarinetist, was born in Chicago as a Jew of immigrant parents of Russian descent. As a deliberate passer, he wholeheartedly embraced this new notion of identity. In “Really The Blues”, Mezzrow himself writes: “We were Jews, but in Cape Girardeau they had told us we were Negroes. Now, all of a sudden, I realized that I agreed with them [...] The Southerners had called me a “nigger-lover” there. Solid. I not only loved those colored boys, but I was one of them – I felt closer to them than I felt to the whites” (Mezzrow 1946: 18). Johnny Otis, also mentioned in the quotation, was an R&B performer who was born to Greek immigrant parents. He grew up in Chicago where he surrounded himself with African Americans - also marrying an African-American woman – and where he submerged himself in African-American culture. When he moved to Los Angeles he began his career in the Black music styles of jazz, blues and R&B. He even appeared on the cover of Negro Achievements magazine in 1951 (Dreisinger 2008: 97). In his autobiography called “Upside Your Head”, Otis says: “I am concerned about my people... African Americans... who are held hostage by a hostile white majority” (Otis 1993: 101). In this citation, Otis clearly includes

himself as a member of African-American culture. Quite remarkably, Otis addresses the problem of authenticity as follows in his work: “When the blues grows out of a unique way of life and it reflects the inside workings of a particular people, as the blues does, then it certainly follows that artists within that culture will function in a freer and more natural manner, and, no matter how skilled the emulator, he or she will never get it quite right.” (107). One can assume that Otis is not self-reflecting here, but rather addressing White artists other than himself.

Could the fact that both Mezzrow and Otis were born to immigrant parents contribute to their motives for passing? Maybe because of their foreign roots in Europe, they felt more ethnically marked than white Americans are. If one supposes that Otis and Mezzrow have successfully passed, this has a lot of influence on the perception of their authenticity. Referring back to the last chapter, one could argue that both musicians do subject appropriation. Because they presented themselves as African Americans, they received the same treatment, facing White discrimination. In this way, experience and provenance authenticity, which were values deemed impossible for the White artist to obtain, are achieved because of passing.

Just as jazz, ragtime, blues and many more African-American music styles were sources of distrust and pleasure for the White public, hip-hop received a similar treatment. The subgenre of “gangsta rap” caused panic among conservative parents whose children bought albums of for example Tupac, Ice-T and 50 Cent. Hip-hop is immensely popular with a young White American audience. More than two-third of hip-hop’s fan base is actually White (Keyes 2002: 5). The majority of these White consumers live in suburbs and are said to be attracted to hip-hop because of the exotic ghetto life that is portrayed (Hagedorn & Davis 2008: 98). White youth can find in Black music a lifestyle that is closer to theirs and to their interests than what the established cultural expressions have to offer (Jones 1988: xxi). Passing forms a problem for the White rap performer. In contrast to jazz and blues, which accepted Mezzrow and Otis as “passing” musicians, the African-American centered world of hip-hop would not and does not accept this phenomenon. Henry Louis Gates exclaimed: “to pass is to sin against authenticity” (Oshana 2010: 67), which makes this practice a taboo for the hip-hop genre that relies on the notion of authenticity so much. The White artist is aware of this and therefore does not engage in it. They create African-American

sounding personae to be on-stage, but are compelled to face and address their Whiteness in their lyrics and in interviews. As mentioned before, they have to claim Whiteness before getting closer to Blackness and hip-hop “realness”.

1.3 Passing and Hip-hop

In Ethnic Studies, the practice of – especially - Black-to-White passing was initially discredited and interpreted as a form of betrayal to oneself and the African-American community. More recently, mixed-race theorists started understanding passing more as a positive way of “selecting an identity” (Nakashima 1992: 177) and as “subverting both the compartment line between dominant and subordinate and the arbitrary line between White and Black.” (Daniel 1992: 92). When it comes to White-to-Black passing, matters remain complicated. In the past, instances of White passing happened out of curiosity to broaden one’s horizon and to garner understanding of the Other. Since the 1950s, White passing evolved in settings of entertainment. For the music genre of hip-hop, passing stands in stark contrast to the core principle of authenticity. Therefore, Black-to-White passing would not make any sense for an African-American musical expression and complete White-to-Black passing will not be expected to occur either. Nevertheless, the first parts of this chapter were helpful for attaining deeper knowledge in the possible transgressions across racial barriers. It elucidated that, in general, thinking in exclusively Black and White has become outdated.

In the context of hip-hop, one could argue quite controversially that the historical law of the one-drop rule has backfired on the White rapper. In the 19th and 20th century one drop of Black blood classified one as inferior and left one without privileges. Today the lack of African or Afro-diasporic heritage seems to be accompanied by a loss of authenticity for the White artist in the eyes of the American hip-hop community. A hint – or one drop - of a African-American ethnicity now entails the advantage of credibility. This explains why for example Mariah Carey, whom I always thought of as a White singer because of her fair skin and straight hair, was initially accepted as an African-American R&B-singer, although this ethnicity only makes up 1/4th of her heritage⁴¹. Throughout her career, Carey never explicitly laid claim on her African-American

⁴¹ “Her dad, Alfred Roy, was of African-American and Venezuelan descent and her mom Patricia is of white Irish-American descent. (Johns 2014)

heritage. As a result, this lack of “explicit racial classification combined with aggressive marketing made her whiteness a given” (Elam and Jackson 2005: 189). This means that Also, her move towards mainstream pop underscored her White image, since pop is considered to be a White genre (199). Blackness can be something that one is born into, but one – especially artists - can only lay claim on it by embracing it publicly as well (Catanese 2011: 42). In hip-hop, White performers can go about two ways: by acknowledging their ethnicity or by ignoring the topic altogether. Either way would have a confirmation of Whiteness as a result

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