The New "Role Model" for the Hip-Hop Generation: Dissecting the Hype to Locate Eminem, Slim Shady, and Marshall Mathers through Race Relations, Black Cool, Media Coverage, and the Search for Hip-Hop Credibility

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines and analyzes the controversy around white rapper Eminem to inspect the way in which black and white theories of belonging function within an American context. The assumption behind the racial dichotomy that defines whites and blacks in oppositional positive and negative terms presumes that identity is structured along race stereotypes. This belief is evident in the differing responses to Eminem's affiliation with hip-hop culture and through the extent in which he employs hip-hop cultural forms, styles, and traits into his rap image. Although a popular mainstream artist, Eminem (and his "thug" Slim Shady alter ego) maintains his credibility within hip-hop circles by using elements of parody, play, and persona to depict his satirical views of American life. Finally, the systematic attacks against Eminem that label him as deviant are rarely levelled against other black rappers, exposing the different societal expectations that exist for whites and blacks.

Ce mémoire examine et analyse la controverse qui entoure le rappeur blanc Eminem dans le but d'étudier comment fonctionnent les théories d'appartenance des blancs et des noirs dans le contexte américain. Derrière la dichotomie raciale qui définit les blancs et les noirs en termes d'oppositions positives et négatives se cache la supposition que la notion d'identité s'établit selon des stéréotypes raciaux. Cette conviction est évidente dans les différentes réactions face à l'attachement d'Eminem à la culture hip-hop, ainsi que dans l'étendue de l'emploi qu'il fait des pratiques culturelles, styles et caractéristiques du hip-hop dans son image de rappeur. Bien qu'il soit un artiste populaire, Eminem (et son *alter ego* délinquant Slim Shady) maintient sa crédibilité au sein du monde hip-hop en utilisant des éléments de la parodie, du théâtre et du jeu de rôle pour illustrer sa vision satirique du mode de vie américain. Finalement, les attaques systématiques contre Eminem qui le caractérisent de deviant son rarements dirigées contre les rappeurs noirs, démontrant qu'il existe dans la société des attentes différentes pour les blancs et les noirs.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, hip-hop's musical and commercial successes are unparalleled by other sub(cultural) musical forms. Rap albums debut at the top of the Billboard music charts consistently and rap songs dominate the airwaves of popular music radio stations. Rap music videos are even among the most requested videos on music video television stations, such as Music Television (MTV) in the United States and Europe, and MuchMusic in Canada. Hip-hop clothing labels, such as Sean Jean and Enyce, are also among the most popular clothing labels for present day's youth. Moreover, hip-hop's cool, defiant attitude, which is also associated with overt expressions of manhood, is becoming a popular way of showing one's opposition to the values and morals of society's dominant group.

This rebellious nature, disregard for societal conventions, and infatuation with everything taboo has struck a chord with youth who are searching for an outlet for their own feelings of anomie and distrust of authority figures. Not only is hip-hop cool more confrontational than previous forms of black cool, but it also best represents the negative stereotypes of blackness that have developed out of white privilege and rebukes openly the constraints that white society places upon black individuals. Thus, members of society's dominant group often view the elements of hip-hop culture as the basis for the increased resentment that white youth hold toward these conventions.

Attacks on hip-hop culture are often launched based on a purported desire to protect the most vulnerable in society. Most often, these "innocents" are white children, whose increasing attraction to and adoption of hip-hop's external elements, such as music and clothing, have become problematic for parents who fear the effect of the negative elements that are associated with blackness and hip-hop (for instance: rejection of white norms, violence, drug use, celebration of guns) on their children. Since the most well recognized members of the hip-hop community are rappers, they often fall under heavy scrutiny from political and cultural critics and have received special attention from groups (for instance, the PMRC, Parental Music Resource Centre) designed specifically to protect children from the corrupt nature of rap music.

The consumption of hip-hop culture by white youth raises interesting issues about appropriation, (race) theories of belonging, and authenticity. Since hip-hop is a cultural

form that developed out of the ghettos and inner-cities, it is widely accepted that hip-hop speaks to and from a black ghetto point-of-view. In expressing trepidation over the influence of white institutional constraints on their lives, rappers often expose how these elements of the dominant structure exploit and restrain their rights. Moreover, thanks in large part to the impression left by white rapper Vanilla Ice, white hip-hop fans are often made to feel that their love of hip-hop is a mere fascination with the rebellious nature of the culture, than a "true" or "real" understanding of what those elements represent. Thus, while white, suburban youth may enjoy "borrowing" elements of hip-hop culture, they are perceived as not having a full understanding of its underclass roots.

The wholehearted embrace of white rapper Eminem by his hip-hop peers and the utter loathing of him by the mainstream, dominant group in the US have made the enjoyment of hip-hop easier for white youth. Through his stylistic innovations, narrative and storytelling ability, and the way that his use of parody mocks the changes to his life and mainstream opinions of his lyrics, Eminem has established himself as a credible and "real" hip-hop voice. While his awareness of the issues surrounding his whiteness and his popularity make him a hit within the hip-hop community, it also makes him more well-liked by suburban youth. Thus, Eminem has become an instant target of familiar hip-hop foes. Politicians, cultural critics, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have all accorded special attention to Eminem, claiming that his rhymes promote violence, scatology, and hatred.

In this thesis, I reflect on the ways in which Eminem produced and constructed his successful rap career despite possessing the racialized identity typically not associated with hip-hop. Traditionally, blacks are associated with the disregard for "normal" behaviour, while whites are held up as representatives of purity, honesty, and goodness (Sartwell, 1998; hooks, 1992, and Mailer, 1957). Through associating himself with hip-hop cultural forms, Eminem shows that this inflexible racial dichotomy in the US is not as clear a construct as America's political and cultural leaders describe it. Eminem's contributions to hip-hop culture as a whole are recognized widely as making serious and important changes to rap delivery and rap narrative. Most importantly though, since hip-hop attempts to make visible and challenge the longstanding perceptions of race in the US, as a "legitimate" white hip-hop voice, Eminem questions the unyielding concept of

race in America. While it is clear that some of his lyrics are inflammatory, many critics overlook the context, irony, changes in tone, shifts in voice, and other intricacies that he employs to convey satire, comedy or during his parodic moments. Furthermore, as well-respected members of the hip-hop community have acknowledged his ties to the underclass, Em's connection to the hip-hop community is based on more than just rap prowess. This incites further criticism, as those who attempt to vilify Eminem as a hateful, misogynist, homophobic thug are forced to confront their own concepts of race and belonging.

I also inspect the issues around Eminem's popularity, devoting a significant portion to the tensions associated with his adoption of a black lifestyle (what this means for both blacks and whites), the criticism and embrace of him in various media sources, and how he works through the latter and the former in his personal responses to the controversy around his work. Furthermore, I examine how Eminem uses his underclass whiteness to create a distinct and unique rap method and thus avoids both the adoption of a distinct black style, and the negative response that is usually accorded white emcees. Thus, Eminem is able to distinguish himself from the legions of white people who wish they had been "born black." Through Eminem, the debates about authenticity, realness, and credibility within hip-hop circles have been revamped. Eminem's coolness is not dependant on exaggerated stories about his manhood on the streets; rather it is developed and maintained through the uniqueness of a style that shifts between Slim Shady's storybook fantasy world and Eminem's search for respect and identity in the tough hip-hop community.

Throughout this thesis, I employ a number of generalized terms to refer to the groups who criticize Eminem. I do so with guarded scepticism, since terms such as "mainstream," "dominant structure," and "dominant culture/groups" have long been dismissed from academia as oversimplifications of societal divisions. In as much as it is difficult to isolate a common link between these groups, aside from their dislike of Em, and since hip-hop now has distinct connections to "mainstream culture," I find it disconcerting to lump together such diverse opinions. As these views range from those of the black and white conservative classes (for example: C. Delores Tucker and Lynne Cheney), to those of the members of the underclass who feel hip-hop's endorsement of a

criminal underclass lifestyle promotes the negative stereotypes of their group, it also becomes problematic to label them as "political and cultural critics."

To deal with this dilemma, I borrow from bell hooks' notions of how individuals in society relate to and sometimes perpetuate the white patriarchal supremacist structure (1994: 6). Regardless of our race, class, or gender, hooks argues that since some of us enjoy benefits due to our own privileged membership, and because of the way in which the dominant structure operates within society, we all react to the dominant structure in a similar manner. That is, because of their relationship to this dominant structure, some strata of society will "repudiate domination in one form while supporting it in another" (ibid. 6). Similarly, hooks argues that most attempts at censorship from within a community (i.e. blacks who support the censorship of hip-hop culture) lie in the marginalized group's desire to present a "positive" image to the dominant group (1994: 66). The desires of these marginalized groups, however, are often shaped by the opinions of the members of the dominant structure, who themselves use various sources (the media being the most widespread) to promote their opinions about hip-hop culture and their concerns for the well-being of groups who are unable to protect themselves (i.e. children).

Eminem's connections to notable members of the hip-hop community and the fact that he has reached the upper echelons of *hip-hop* respect in such a short time deserve serious attention. The white rapper from East Detroit has risen to become the biggest hip-hop star in the world in only four years. Since his first major-label release *The Slim Shady LP* (1999), he has dominated the pop and rap charts and has gained a reputation as an angry, violent thug with tight emcee skills. Driven by his sometimes gangsta alter ego Slim Shady, Eminem has become the newest target of political groups and cultural critics, who describe his work as potentially harmful to his fans and blame him for the degeneration of white youth. However, those who appreciate his skills and what he has brought to hip-hop, indicate that he offers a distorted vision of a white underprivileged life of poverty and brings attention to a condition that was thought previously to affect black youth only.

Before going solo in 1996, Eminem, whose legal, government name is Marshall Mathers, rapped in several groups (Basement Productions, the New Jacks, and Sole Intent). His debut album *Infinite* (1996) was far from successful, inciting more criticism

than praise, since he was perceived as imitating the style of other rappers and because he maintained a distance from hip-hop's street roots. However, Eminem's second independent release *The Slim Shady EP* (1997) would make him into an underground star. He changed his style completely, shifting from a "positive rapper" to an angry, violent thug. In 1998, he recorded the underground classic "5 Star Generals" on Rawkus Records with rappers Shabaam Sahdeeq, Kewst, Skam, and A.L, which helped him to establish a name for himself in the undergrounds of Japan, New York, and Los Angeles. It was his second-place finish at the 1997 Los Angeles Rap Olympics[1] that earned him a major-label deal with one of the best producers in the hip-hop, former NWA member Dr. Dre. *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) hit quadruple-platinum status (four million albums sold)[2] and won Eminem two 1999 Grammy Awards (best rap album and best rap song for "My Name is"). While *The Slim Shady LP* helped Eminem skyrocket to fame and enlarge his fan base across the United States and the world, the no-holds barred poignant lyrics sparked instant controversy among Washington circles and with many other groups in society.

With the release of *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000), Eminem rose to even more critical acclaim. To date, the album has been certified eight times platinum in the US alone[3], earning Eminem more mainstream success and creating even controversy than *The Slim Shady LP*. With words and subjects that were even angrier, and a more critical view of the latent hypocrisies in society, *The Marshall Mathers LP* sparked numerous calls for censorship and the still on-going debates on artistic responsibility. Despite all of this, Eminem dominated the rap and pop charts and was nominated for four Grammys, winning for best rap album, best rap song ("The Real Slim Shady"), best rap duo ("Forgot About Dre" with Dr. Dre), and losing in the best overall album category to Steely Dan's *Two Against Nature*. If the Grammy Awards were not plagued with enough outrage from these nominations, an even more intriguing addition to the ceremony was the much-anticipated performance of his hit single "Stan" with gay singer-piano player Elton John.

Along with the unprecedented success of *The Marshall Mathers LP* came the controversies over his lyric content, hassles from the FCC and FTC, battles with the PMRC, and of course, the limelight on his family life. Eminem furthermore was nearly barred from entering Canada for his 2000 Anger Management Tour as Ontario Attorney-General Jim Flaherty asked Canada's Immigration Department to prevent him from

crossing the Canada-US border. Flaherty felt that, since Eminem rapped about women and homosexuals with such disdain, he should be seen as promoting hate.

While Canadian immigration officials refused Flaherty's request since Eminem has not been convicted of hate crimes, it should be mentioned that the above is an extreme example of government officials intervening in Eminem's music career. Most critics are restrained in their attempts to control his mobility, and instead try to appeal to his sense of morality and responsibility. However, this Canadian example stirs up further debate over calls for censorship of hip-hop music. While the words of many other black rappers are just as inflammatory as Eminem's, they often escape the same levels of criticism. Thus, criticism of Eminem reveals that white men are held to higher moral standards than their black counterparts:

> Just how controversial is Eminem, really? Nas rhymed that he went to hell when he was 12 for punching out Jesus Christ. If Tupac carried out some of the threats he made on records, practically half of the hip-hop community would have caught severe beatdowns. Biggie once rapped about sticking up pregnant women. Even the Jiggaman [Jay-Z] has soiled his manicured hands, narrating how he's sold more cocaine and busted more rounds of ammo than Al Pacino's heralded Scarface character. Yet, none have come under more fire for their records than Eminem. (Reid 2002)

Throughout this thesis, I will examine how the different standards for white and black men have affected Eminem's hip-hop career. In Chapter 1, "Reflecting on Black Cool: Music, Identity, and Controversy," I introduce black musical forms and their links with cool attitudes, examining how the changing idea of cool intersects with authenticity. Specifically, I am interested in the expression of disadvantage as cool, the importance of hip-hop cool and street credibility for rappers, and how the use of hip-hop's cool pose has different implications for white rappers. In Chapter 2, "Eminem in the News: Raisin' Havoc and Playin' the Media Game," I look at the on-going controversy around Eminem and the various censorship debates occurring in hip-hop and non-hip-hop media. More recently, Eminem's work has been at the centre of most of this coverage. I also examine the perception of musicians as role models and how Eminem manages to maintain his street credibility despite his increasing status as an icon for teens. I devote Chapters 3 and 4 to specific elements of Eminem's work. Since much of this work is based on Em's responses to the ways in which his images have blown up in media and political circles, I

discuss how, with the release of subsequent albums, Eminem continues to take his style to the next level. Chapter 3, "From *Infinite* to *The Marshall Mathers LP*: Eminem's Search for his own Hip-Hop Voice," is an introspective look at the evolution of Eminem's Slim Shady alter ego and the changes from his underground albums *Infinite* (1996) and *The Slim Shady EP* (1997) to the extraordinary success of his major-label albums *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) and *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000). The emergence of Slim Shady marks an important shift in Em's work that can be related back to hip-hop's roots and the importance assigned to street credibility. Finally, in Chapter 4, "Keepin' it Real in a Fantasy World: Persona, Parody, and Play in Eminem's Lyrics" I look closely at the specific elements of Eminem's major-label work that allow him to maintain this credibility. As the various elements of parody, play, and persona, mixed into his real and fantasy worlds, make it more difficult to differentiate Em's "serious" work from his "humour" songs, Eminem often falls under constant attack from members of the dominant group who disagree with his opinions and depictions of American life.

While the blacks-as-bad-whites-as-good race dichotomy is an unfortunate feature of American life, challenges to this structure of domination are evident in the escalating mainstreaming of hip-hop culture. Em's work has raised the ire of many individuals because of the ways in which he questions the validity of such constructions. Even when he does not do this with specific words or actions, since his personal experiences are more typical of a "black existence" than a white one, Eminem threatens the very foundation upon which American race relations were built. Eminem and other rappers often display a sharp-edged understanding of these race issues; however, they present their views in a highly confrontational manner that alarms members of the dominant group. Thus feeling impelled to "protect" the "traditions" of US culture, hip-hop and Eminem are often labelled as deviants. Through this scapegoating, we can conclude, though hip-hop is seen as promoting values that have bearing in the non-white world only, that its links to American life continue to resonate within the dominant structure.

Notes

[1] A copy of this performance is on Eminem's official website. <http://www.eminem.com>
[2] From the Official Web site of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). <http://www.riaa.com>
[3] RIAA, ibid.

CHAPTER 1: REFLECTING ON BLACK COOL: MUSIC, IDENTITY, AND CONTROVERSY

Since its rise from the underground of American inner-cities in the early 1980s, hip-hop styles and rap music have become the standard of cool for youth. Due to the widespread adoption of such styles, rappers such as New Yorker Doug E. Fresh[1] often echo the sentiment about hip-hop as "life"style that many individuals both in and out of the hip-hop community believe to be true. His views emphasize that although the appearance of cool is dependent on the visual, a cool attitude is something that comes from within: "[Hip-hop] has to be from the heart. It has to be something that you live. It can't be something that you just come out and do" (in Kitwana 1994: 20). His comments also support the belief that hip-hop's distinct connections to a lower-class existence give its members a certain amount of "soul," a coolness, to which non-members are not privy, but which they often seek to obtain. With rhymes about their distrust for police, authority, and society, the vocalized elements of hip-hop culture express the disdain of young black males for the institutional practices of a society that sees no potential value in their contributions. As the messengers of such ideas, rappers have become a parent's biggest nightmare. They are rebels, but unlike those of previous generations, these dissenters *have* a cause: to expose the hypocrisies of the same members of society that admonish the moral ambivalence of black youth.

In this chapter, I examine how the idea of "cool" intersects with race and how this idea continues to resonate within black American cultural forms. Ever since jazz, and later the blues, captured the imagination of whites for the purposes of entertainment, as black cultural forms, clothing styles, and attitudes have changed, so too has the definition of cool. From its evolution as a form of restrained resentment to an anger-ridden hatred, cool and race are now linked intrinsically to both style and attitude. Furthered by the recent wave of hip-hop stars, currently, the hip-hop "street thug" lifestyle has come to epitomize cool for youth. Through hip-hop, the attitude and style associated with blackness have been redefined and now involve violent tendencies and the display of extreme aggression. Although there are set standards for hip-hop cool, as with previous forms of cool, there is heavy importance placed on both individuality and showing that cool is an innate characteristic, rather than something that is derived from clothing

choices and hip-hop's physical postures. This form of cool, and the nihilistic attitude associated with it, first gained notoriety with members of the dominant structure during late 1980s because of gangsta rap's most prominent group at the time, Niggaz With Attitude (NWA). Since then, numerous other rappers have used this style to enhance their own hip-hop performances, such as 2Pac, Biggie Smalls, and even Vanilla Ice, the latter of whom is an example of the misuse of hip-hop cool.

DISADVANTAGE BECOMES COOL

The rampant racism in society confines black youth within the unyielding and unfriendly limits of the inner-city, and thus restricts them to lives of economic and social distress. For black youth, access to the formal economy is limited to unskilled, tedious minimum wage jobs, and rejecting such jobs pushes black males to seek employment in illegal activities, resulting in their being labelled as deviants (Sampson 1997: 42). This behaviour that forms the primary basis for hip-hop cool is grounded in the culture of the streets and is linked with misguided, confused loyalties, racism, and poverty. Furthermore, it is often expressed through revengeful acts of vigilante justice worn like badges of honour, which have become an integral part of inner-city youth culture.

Rappers are the voice of this cool. Their cool is based on a defiance of "white" authority and the maintaining of a sense of detachment for societal norms. Boyd (1997: 31-33) defines the characteristics associated with this street or hip-hop cool that places status in the world of the underground economy, as defiance of almost everything; only in showing that he "rejects the mainstream even though he has already been absorbed by it" (ibid.) can a rapper claim the traits associated with this cool. Connor describes "street cool" as that which defines the code of manhood for urban males. This is conveyed through three elements — experience, attitude, and ability for self-defence — and "is the stage of cool that is angry, daring and impulsive. It is also the mode of cool that deals the most in style and symbols" (1995: 19-20). While Boyd and Connor each assign different names to the new black cool, the traits they identify for it remain similar. These assessments are right in line with that of Pountain and Robins (2000: 152) who state that cool individuals, in declaring themselves to be such, state that they are non-participants and do not share, nor do they wish to be swayed by, the values of straight society.

While the majority of rap artists tend to rise from disadvantaged backgrounds (be those circumstances financial, social, and/or political), which gives a sort of "authenticity" to their rhymes, the rapper's ability to demonstrate a connection to underclass beginnings still holds much importance in hip-hop culture. Embedded within the emphasis placed on rhyming skills is the ability on the part of the artist to re-assert an identity based on an underclass upbringing in spite of a spatial dislocation from the inner-city. Since established hip-hop artists can rarely demonstrate this connection through rhyming about their previous experiences of poverty, violence, and material deprivation, (since, after they have left these conditions, it is no longer deemed appropriate to "complain" about them) they often employ a form of "cool." This allows them to utilize the full extent of physical postures, bodily and verbal language, clothing style, and attitude to relay their disdain for mainstream conventions.

It remains difficult to prove the underclass backgrounds of most rappers. As a result, rap music has re-adjusted, and although it is still important, proving a ghetto existence now receives less emphasis:

> It is widely accepted that Rap is implicitly conjoined with spaces of urban poverty, existing as both a product and a legitimate voice of a minority teen constituency that is also demographically defined as a part of the social "underclass." Although urban housing projects and areas of chronic economic depression do comprise major sites of Rap's production and consumption, Rap has evolved and the range of its influences has expanded, rendering its lingering status as "ghetto" music increasingly problematic. (Forman 1997: 6)

Cool, which codes blacks with the physical (sports, violence, sex, and dance) also addresses the dualistic conception of race that has come to associate black Americans with primal behaviours. While white Americans, who themselves feel the same scorn for the way in which those same social conventions are imposed upon their own lives also adopt forms of hip-hop cool, their actual understanding of hip-hop culture remains questionable. Since they may also be unaware of the motivations and reasons behind the use of this cool by black Americans, further questionable is what kind of attitude they hope to demonstrate through the adoption of hip-hop cool's external elements (i.e. blackness and hip-hop are often associated with negative emotions).

However, the rejection of certain mainstream elements by rappers does not explain hip-hop's obsession with material possessions, the emphasis placed on loyalty, or

pro-capitalist ideals. Unlike the hippies of mid-century, hip-hop artists do not promote a lifestyle that disapproves of money and aggrandization. The opposite, in fact, is frequently true. Ironically, rappers uphold many of the values they are rebelling against, but include an additional twist since they pursue such values through "unconventional" means. As Terry Williams explains, in his forward to Connor's *What is Cool? Understanding Black Manhood in America*, "unlike hip, cool is not against everything mainstream, is not about total disaffection, nor does it resemble a total culture of refusal. Cool is an unexpected attitude catching the society off-guard and conquering defiantly with its own inimitable style" (1995: xiii). Because of hip-hop's emphasis on the external, visual cool as a distinct black style, it is easy to accept any black wearer of the clothes, with an attitude to boot, as a "legitimate" user of cool. Freccero however warns against seeing such an identity as giving anyone, regardless of racial affiliations, a real connection to hip-hop culture. Within commodity culture, demonstrating an external connection to cool often takes precedence over the internal aspects of cool: "'Authenticity' and 'experience' are frequently invoked to provide a valid foundation for identity politics. Identity as such does not automatically guarantee a certain body of experience, and experience does not automatically attach itself to identity" (Freccero 1999: 63).

The hip-hop pose is not something the wearer simply employs to be cool, but a style that is supposed to bear a connection to his life. According to Michael Eric Dyson, rap music is a result of the increasing social isolation that has occurred in ghetto communities in the past few decades. As the subjects of rap narratives are usually derived from the rapper's first-hand experiences, rap also reflects the "human" side of class divisions: "[this has] given rise to a form of musical expression that *captures* the ghetto existence" (1993: 7, emphasis added). For instance, in "Renagade" Jay-Z describes the continued influence of the ghetto on his life and music:

> Motherfuckers say that I'm foolish; I only talk about jewels (bling bling)
> Do you fools listen to music or do you just skim through it?
> See I'm influenced by the ghetto you ruined
> That same dude you gave nothing; I made somethin doin
> What I do through and through and
> I give you the news with a twist; it's just his ghetto point-of-view

In speaking to and from a black point of view, Fernando jr. (1994: 255) argues that rap

"captures and epitomizes contemporary black culture" and vocalizes life in the inner-city, thus making it a prime candidate for suburban youth who find their own lives to be dismal, boring, and void of what they misconstrue as the excitement of the ghetto. Potter furthermore asks how the mix of black and white has intensified the politics of race in hip-hop. He explains that this mixing of races in music complicates matters outside of the music industry because it creates the illusion that whites are now more aware of the black struggle for survival under the constraints of society when that may hardly be the case:

> ... while it is true that in a sense there is no unitary "black" subject position, that race is a social construction, and that in either biological or cultural terms, America has (and has long had) a profoundly "mixed" culture, it is also true that the economic, social, and personal mobility of Americans is increasingly disparate along lines of both race and class. (1995: 135)

In his ethnographic study of youth crime and employment in three inner-city boroughs of New York, Mercer Sullivan found that most inner-city youth who chose lives of economic criminal activity over employment in the formal economy based much of their decision on the lack of job security, safe working conditions, and advancement in the legitimate work force. Most of the jobs available to these youth were off-the-books freelance jobs, which offered neither economic security nor stability (1989: 68). In addition, the police force, which enact a form of social control over the inner-city, are an additional barrier "defin[ing] young men according to the prevailing master-status characterization of young black males, which interprets their youth, race, and gender as potential signs of danger" (Watkins 1998: 215). Black youth face the colour-code, which labels them as "dangerous and also authorizes the deployment of military-style tactics and technology as necessary for the maintenance of social order. ... Sharp racial and gender coding devices shape the surveillance of society's formal institution of social control, the police, and other law-enforcement agencies" (ibid. 216).

Black youth thus become trapped in what W.E.B. DuBois describes as two-ness, or the effect of the binary division of America on black Americans: "[Two-ness] describes the anomaly of American racial arrangements, which segregate black from white, discriminate along racial lines, and yet oblige Afro-Americans to assimilate the values of white America" (in Cripps 1995: 359). The failure of attempts to unite this "partitioned dualism" in the lives of black youth heightens the apathy of inner-city youth

and further isolates them in the culture of the streets. Consequently, black youth are perceived as lacking strong social and moral values (since whites, by comparison, are upheld as the example of morality and goodness), which further encourage their "deviant" behaviours. As Robert J. Sampson (1997: 42) found, this social isolation in the inner-city forces black youth to adapt to the institutional constraints imposed on their opportunities for upward mobility:

> In short, cultural influences in social disorganization theory stem from processes by which cognitive landscapes rooted in the dynamics of urban social ecology influence behavioural expectations. Community and situational contexts characterized by social disorganization and cultural isolation attenuate the existential relevance of mainstream values, and this process in turn facilitates diversity of values and a collective state of anomie and mistrust. These conditions provide fertile soil for the emergence of deviant patterns of behaviour that the community cannot effectively resist and that in time becomes rationalized.

Excessive police harassment, one of the foremost institutional constraints on blacks, is a constant issue on rap albums. Both the treatment of blacks and these observations from rappers incur what Mike Davis (in Watkins 1998: 217) coins as "*black*lash" against youth criminality, where members of the black community themselves exert social control over black inner-city youth. Although Davis associates blacklash with the black middle-class, it can be related back to DuBois' two-ness. According to Davis, even though they may lead completely different lifestyles, the stereotypes of the black underclass are often transferred over to members of the black middle and upper classes. Despite living "decent" lives and following the dominating conventions of society, these individuals continue to be judged and treated as criminals or as capable of criminal behaviour because of their racial affiliations. In order to show their complete disconnection from the black underclass, they thus engage in reverse discrimination and themselves identify black inner-city males as deviants, despite what their records (or more correctly, lack thereof) indicate about their character.

The cool pose became a coping device employed by young African-American males from the inner-city and this "black dress" started to become symbolic of the deviance of the urban underclass. In hip-hop expression, one of the easiest ways of achieving this resistance is through the cool pose attitude that puts forth social disdain for the very institutions of which the rapper has become a part. Described by Richard Majors

(in Beavers 1997: 257) as a dialectical phenomenon, the cool pose emanates from the way that black men have learned "to mistrust the words and actions of dominant white people [and thus], black males have learned to make great use of "poses" and "postures" which connote control, toughness and detachment."

THE SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF HIP-HOP COOL

The reliance on exterior clothing to depict this attitude makes hip-hop's cool identity a process that is revolving constantly. Today, "Sean John," P. Diddy's label, and "SDC" (Snoop Dogg Clothing), two successful hip-hop labels that many other rappers also use, have, by association, become cool, but who can say how long this will last? If in an instant, either Puff or Snoop do something to shake the foundation of their coolness, youth who yearn to be considered cool would be forced to shed those labels just as quickly as they exchanged their Levis for Tommy Hilfigers in the early 1990s. As Potter (1995: 131) explains, due to the emphasis placed on getting the right look, the constant changes that effect "who's "in" and who's "out," and the instant commodification, "[s]ubcultures ... while collectively aware of their appropriate and intermingled roots, are no less anxious to reinscribe the boundaries between "us" and "them," between "those who know" and "those who don't."

When rapper Showbiz (in Fernando jr. 1994: 255) reiterates the statement about hip-hop made by rapper Doug E. Fresh, used at the beginning of this chapter, he suggests that hip-hop's external use of language and clothing creates an us/them culture: "It's like a way of life. This is a culture, so *look at us*. See how we are? It's the way we dress, the way we talk, the way *our state of mind* is, the things we do. This is how we can relate" (emphasis added). All of these elements to which Showbiz points combine to play an important role in the rap artist's career. For black rappers, the cool pose is an inherent part of who and what they are and has come to be considered as an innate aspect of blackness that black artists merely resurrect. Choosing to employ the cool pose overtly will not affect the black hip-hop artist's career in a negative way; in fact, it may be just the opposite case. Those who do not use this cool are sometimes deemed "soft" in the collective eyes of the hip-hop community.

One need only look at the careers of black hip-pop rappers MC Hammer and the

Fresh Prince (who now raps under his legal name Will Smith) to see how instinctive the cool attitude has become for black rappers. MC Hammer's rhymes and style did not display any connection to the hip-hop style of cool, and now, some 10 years after his success, most members of the hip-hop community view his contribution to hip-hop in negative terms. Despite a unique style, Hammer's catch-phrase rhymes fell more on the pop side of the musical spectrum. His songs did not reflect on hip-hop's more common subjects of poverty or inner-city violence; nevertheless, his music appealed to young teens that were more interested in the latest dance craze than in social issues. Furthermore, Hammer did not have any hip-hop realness to back up his style and was therefore seen as a pop rapper, rather than a hip-hop star with popular appeal.

On the other hand, when Will Smith rapped under the moniker Fresh Prince, he exuded the cool pose. Backward caps, baggy jeans, and a hit song reminding teens that "Parents Just Don't Understand," combined with his push to have the Grammys televise the portion of the award show that honoured rap categories, made the Fresh Prince and his partner, DJ Jazzy Jeff, some the biggest boosters of hip-hop culture. However, now as Will Smith he chides "harder" hip-hop artists regularly for their language use and content and has watered-down his own style, donning western wear for "Wild Wild West," and rapping about the beaches of "Miami." These changes have not had a negative impact on Will Smith's rapping career. Unlike MC Hammer, he maintains his successful pop-rap career and, since becoming a solo artist, he has had two multi-platinum albums. While Smith contends that these changes to his career reflect the personal changes in his life (he is now a husband, a father, and a successful actor), for the hip-hop community, he is more solid proof of the negative result of the mainstreaming of hip-hop: "acts such as Fresh Prince, later Will Smith, pulls cultural production into the mix which for many ... means the sanitizing of rap's expression of urban realities, resulting in sterile hip-hop that, devoid of its original fire, will offend no one" (Dyson 1993: 8).

For white rappers, the attempt to fuse attitude and style is much more controversial. Even before white rappers can start their careers, their decision to use or not use hip-hop cool brings forth a number of issues. Since hip-hop cool is a pose against the mostly white middle-class standards that limit blacks, white rappers must not only demonstrate rapping skill but must also justify their reasons for using this cool. As with

black rappers who choose not to use cool as a part of their rapping image, this decision can beget either favourable or unfavourable responses from those in the hip-hop community. For instance, to date, rap music's biggest white acts have been Vanilla Ice, the Beastie Boys, and Eminem, all of whom have employed different styles and ways of using cool. While the Beastie Boys and Vanilla Ice are complete opposites when it comes to the use of cool, Eminem, rap's biggest commercial success story, employs this aspect in a different and more complex manner.

First, the differences between the Beastie Boys and Vanilla Ice add interesting insight into the cool pose and the negative or positive effects for the careers of white rap artists. Vanilla Ice's attempts to appear black both in style and lifestyle failed and were unappreciated by the community, especially when it was revealed that he was in actuality raised as a member of the middle-class. Thus, his use of the cool pose backfired; and, after his claims of underclass youth were proven false, he became an "uncool" poser who did not have a firsthand understanding of the underclass existence. Vanilla Ice employed hip-hop cool to a tee; his use was refined, unflawed, and lacked spontaneity, which may have been the problem. His cool did not appear as an innate quality since it lacked the ruggedness of other rappers. Furthermore, he was seen as someone who misused hip-hop culture for personal financial gains, and as such was someone who did not understand the social, political, and cultural roots of the style and attitude.

The complete disregard for hip-hop conventions is precisely what gives the Beastie Boys a form of authenticity in the hip-hop community. The white group members did not pretend to share or understand the experiences of black rappers and the constant references to their suburban whiteness are what play an important and contributing factor to their continued success in the hip-hop community (Sartwell 1998: 171). The Beastie Boys found cool in an unrelentless rebellious punk-attitude against their parents, who were often portrayed as people whose morals and values would not allow the young Beastie Boys to have any fun. In addition, the Beastie Boys often made fun of their own interest in hip-hop, indicating that coming from "good homes" was the exact circumstance that pushed them to seek an outlet through hip-hop culture. While far from the epitome of hip-hop cool, their awareness of their appropriation of hip-hop culture offered them a higher standing in the hip-hop community than Vanilla Ice. This level of

awareness, and their rebellious stories about wild parties and skipping school ("Fight for Your Right"), gave the Beastie Boys something that Vanilla Ice did not have in his hip-hop performance: an individual approach to rapping. While this may have not been as "real" as that of black rappers, their individual style gave them their own kind of hip-hop authenticity.

For Eminem the use of cool brings together entirely different issues. His underclass upbringing during the 1980s in the tough black neighbourhoods of East Detroit, absent father, and dysfunctional relationships with his mother and his now ex-wife make him a prime candidate for using hip-hop cool. Since he was also schooled on the lyrics of LL Cool J, NWA, Ice-T, and the Beastie Boys, Eminem demonstrates a keen understanding of the culture. Eminem's clothing choices, attitude, and stylistic devices are all indicative of hip-hop cool; however, he is not seen as misusing black culture like Vanilla Ice. Instead, he appears to understand that cool is not something that can be picked up for the purposes of hip-hop performance. These personal inner-city experiences form a large part of his rap narrative, but as a white person who had a similar childhood to many other black rappers, Eminem approaches mainstream fears about hip-hop in a different manner because, as his childhood and his current popularity show, the culture influences suburban youth just as much as urban youth.

Furthermore, Eminem's rap style demonstrates that he still respects the hip-hop's traditions of "street credibility" and gangsta rap. Through his alter ego Slim Shady, Eminem adopts many of the same traits that are usually reserved for black males, such as nihilism, distrust of women, and open defiance of authority. Shady's aggressive, violent tendencies and attraction to guns, allow Eminem to include an aspect of a thug narrative in his rhymes and acknowledge that this "posturing" is fictional. As Shady is an alter ego that he created in response to the initial negativity to his whiteness from some members of Detroit's rap underground, Slim can also be seen as having developed out of Marshall Mathers' childhood, Eminem's early rap career conditions, and the social, physical, and financial conditions that link his personas to the "black existence" of Detroit's inner-city.

HIP VS. COOL IN BLACK MUSICAL FORMS

I will reassess Eminem's use of hip-hop cool in more detail later in this chapter,

but first, I would like to examine the intermingling of race, cool, and music and how cool moved from the subdued anger of blues singers to the full out hostility of rappers. Furthermore, given the social conditions that allowed hip-hop music to flourish, redefining it as the expression of resistance toward an oppressive class situation could be seen as a contentious approach. Arguments put forth by Tricia Rose, however, allow for some movement where subcultural expressions are concerned. Rose's argument that style and gestures can be seen as oblique challenges to structures of domination, allows for the cool pose to be seen as a communicative form of deviance from social norms. She also argues that hip-hop's clothing styles offer a critique of class distinctions and social hierarchies by creating an external oppositionality and further sees these trends in direct relation to the severe conditions of the urban areas from where they have sprung: "[a]s an alternative means of status formation, hip-hop style forges local identities for teenagers who understand their limited access to traditional avenues of social status attainment" (1994: 38).

The hip-hop style, however, has become symbolic of the deviance of (black) youth from social norms. According to Anderson, hip-hop culture is related to the code of the streets, the visual style of which allows black men to assert their manhood on the streets:

> The code revolves around the presentation of the self. Its basic requirement is the display of a certain predisposition to violence. Accordingly, one's bearing must send the unmistakable if sometimes subtle message to "the next person" in public that one is capable of violence and mayhem when the situation requires it — that one can take care of oneself. ... Physical appearance, including clothes, jewellery, and grooming also plays an important part in how a person is viewed; to be respected, you have to look right. (1997: 18-19)

A key element to hip-hop's cool pose is thus the propping up of self-image. Through the cool pose the wearer is able to send messages that are contrary to the supposed calm and rational behaviour of most members of society's dominant group. This potential for violence is demonstrated through a physical appearance and the stereotyped style of dress that are associated with the streets and the gangsta lifestyle, (for instance: over-sized clothes, bandanas, chains, and bomber jackets) that convince members of the mainstream that the wearer is someone to fear because of his potential gang affiliation.

While Kinshasa defines this disregard for social norms and mores as a part of the

inner-city youth culture, he also argues that the clothing and language style that came to be seen as evocative of a criminalized lifestyle are now associated with black inner-city youth, social deviance, and the outright rejection of the dominant and mainstream culture (1997: 292). Potter, who explains that the attitude of social resistance becomes more difficult as the rap artist becomes more popular, also argues that:

> Subcultural resistance, never more so than with hip-hop, must continue to *stage* itself as relentlessly uncompromising; its codes and modes of action move in a way that is both vernacular (generated on the most local level of speech, acts, dress and sound) *and* spectacular (seizing the means of representation in order to interrupt "our regularly scheduled broadcast"). (1995: 132)

Street or hip-hop cool "emerged from a desperate need for guidelines concerning maturity that incorporated the strange challenges of street life, or life without the tools of American traditional manhood, of a life where life itself is the only thing you possess that's of any value" (Connor 1995: 20). This is where we can link cool and violent behaviour. For black men, manhood is not determined by the same standards as for their white counterparts. Black men are unable to find steady jobs, thus their ability to provide secure lives (both financial and physical) for themselves and their loved ones is limited. Since they have little else, cool has become the "most basic method of determining manhood" (ibid. 1). While previous forms of black cool were based on a personal fashion sensibility and the concealment of one's disdain, hip-hop cool is derived from sporadic anger. Rather than remaining "calm" under stress, cool was based on "wildin' out" (attacking) others. Coolness, therefore, could now be claimed based on the seizing of another person's cool, be that through the stealing of clothing, manhood, or lives. As a person cannot declare himself cool if he has been beaten (physically or otherwise), the appearance of toughness is essential to cool manhood on the streets, since it will "alert" potential attackers of the wearer's coolness. Thus, in order to sustain a stronghold on a cool characterization, it became important to maintain an air of immunity that would send a clear message: my cool is not up for grabs.

In *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude* (2000) Pountain and Robins address the changing notion of cool in American cultural contexts. In taking the concept of cool back to the restrained defiance of African slaves brought to America against their wills, they note that the subcultural origins of cool allow for it to be defined as a "rebellious attitude,

an expression of a belief that the mainstream mores of your society have no legitimacy and do not apply to you" (ibid. 23). A key aspect to cool is an "ironic detachment" (ibid. 26) that allows cool individuals to conceal their feelings by appearing unfazed by the situations they face (for instance, impending physical harm) and yet maintain their attachment to other elements of society. For instance, hip-hop youth may reject many values of "straight" society, but their actions also show support for materialism and capitalism. Specifically on the cool attitude, Pountain and Robins say:

> Cool is an oppositional attitude adopted by individuals or small groups to express defiance to authority — whether that of the parent, the teacher, the police, the boss or the prison warden. Put more succinctly, we see Cool as a *permanent* state of *private* rebellion. *Permanent* because Cool is not just some 'phase that you go through', something that you 'grow out of', but rather something that if once attained remains for life; *private* because Cool is not a collective political response but a stance of individual defiance, which does not announce itself in strident slogans but conceals its rebellion behind a mask of ironic impassivity. (Ibid. 19, emphasis original)

According to Pountain and Robins, "[t]he cool aesthetic was honed during the early part of the twentieth century by those descendants of Africans ... who deployed cool as a body armour against the discrimination, patronization, and neglect they experienced from the mostly white-owned entertainment business" (ibid. 41). Previous forms of cool emphasized a calm demeanour in the face of adversity; strength was found in reserved nature and the suppression of anger. With hip-hop, cool became different. Gone were the days of masked defiance. Strength was now found in the outright expression of anger, usually through violent means involving guns and gang-related activity. Cool moved away from covert celebrations of sexuality and defiance: "[d]espite a veneer of revolutionary, anti-police talk, this hip-hop attitude was perfectly in tune with the '80s pursuit of fame, money, and sex by 'whatever means necessary'" (ibid. 110). Coolness, therefore, was found in the ability to "wild out" sporadically, sometimes without "just cause" and, unlike before, value was seen in the vocalization of inner-city street codes, rather than veiling conformity through "peaceful" means of protest.

Gangsta rap, in rejecting openly the Black Nationalism and Afrocentricism of message rap, steered rap audiences away from the more positive and unifying cool of message rap (Boyd 1997: 39). As "white and black listeners [became] drawn to this surly form of urban apostasy, fashionable deviancy, and stylized outlawry" (McLaren 1999:

25) message rappers were cool no longer. Instead, given the new fascination with violence (especially from white youth) and with songs about beating on 'hos, bitches, and niggas, gangsta rap became the newest way of rebelling against the values of the previous generation (Pountain and Robins 2000: 110). In relating cool to jazz and blues singers of the 1940s and 1950s, Pountain and Robins discuss how the moral ambivalence (for the norms and mores of the society at that time) that was displayed by performers and is now employed by rappers, appeals to white teens but is problematic for parents. Their suggestion that cool can be seen as a defence mechanism against white oppression does not come without a warning: "[t]his defense does not come free of charge and this moral ambivalence is its price: a suburban middle-class teenager may have nothing materially in common with a slave in a levee camp, but psychologically, they share the sexually confused, passive-aggressive tone of the blues" (ibid. 45). Pountain and Robins are thus able to associate notions of cool with (black) race: "by the '50s whites wanted to be cool too" (ibid. 41) and began to adopt selects parts of the black lifestyle — music, clothes, and attitude — to express their own distaste for the morals of previous generations.

Blackness, however, was not the only cultural form whites employed to confront society. The "hippies" of the 1960s dressed in brightly coloured ethnic styles and adopted Buddhist, Hindu, Indian (Native and South Asian), and Afghan ways of life as a counter-cultural approach to show that "even though they were not excluded from capitalist affluence, they chose to reject it in favour of something more egalitarian and 'authentic'" (ibid. 74). In adopting race styles, cool individuals could claim to have more of an authentic cool to the leather jacket and motorcycles that were associated with the cause-less rebellions of the James Deans and Marlon Brandos. While the hippie style was more "hip" than "cool," (possibly because it was primarily a white phenomenon) it was still based upon notions of authenticity: "[t]o be Hip one had both to acknowledge this repression, and to oppose it by dressing and living in an approved manner: sympathetic middle-class liberals might pass the first test [dressing properly] and thus be described as cool, but they failed the second [living in an approved manner]" (ibid. 75).

NORMAN MAILER AND "THE WHITE NEGRO"

In his pivotal 1957 essay "The White Negro," Norman Mailer pondered the

intersections between white youth, black race, and cool (Mailer substitutes the term "hip" for cool). He explored the heightened white interest in black cultural forms and, in a conclusion that speculates on the future of the hipster, Mailer could even be interpreted as prophesying the rise of gangsta rap. He warned that if Americans (and American society) did not make room for all facets of American life, including black cultural forms, and if the social, psychological, and moral crises around blackness would not be resolved, blacks would find more confrontational ways of expressing and showing their resistance to their exclusion from society. I believe that this is an important point so I have quoted Mailer at length:

> Since the Negro knows more about the ugliness and danger of life than the white, it is probable that if the Negro can win his equality, he will possess a potential superiority, a superiority so feared that the fear itself has become the underground drama of domestic politics. ... With this possible emergence of the Negro, Hip may erupt as a psychically armed rebellion whose sexual impetus may rebound against the antisexual foundation of every organized power in American, and bring into the air such animosities, antipathies, and new conflicts of interest that the mean empty hypocrisies of mass conformity will no longer work. A time of violence, new hysteria, confusion and rebellion will then be likely to replace the time of conformity. (1957: 16)

Relating hip to the black experience during that time (which is similar to contemporary images of urban ghettos) Mailer discussed how imperviousness to violence and family and job security were unattainable for blacks because of the stereotypes that were associated with them. These assumptions controlled every aspect of their lives, causing them to search for ways to express real aspects of their personalities. Despite attempts to integrate into society, black males were denied access to nearly every aspect of American society on a systematic basis. Black males therefore learned the tough lesson that their contributions to society would always be undervalued.

Thus, "hated from outside and therefore hating himself, the Negro was forced into the position of exploring all those moral wildernesses of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns as delinquent or evil or immature or morbid or self-destructive or corrupt" (ibid. 9). In realizing the futility of their attempts to convince whites of their morality, Mailer suggests that blacks conformed, gave in, and made these "uncivilized qualities" a part of their existence:

> Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the

> Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body and in music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream, and despair of his orgasm" (Ibid. 4)

Those who dare to live their lives by these same standards are the courageous few, or the American existentialist, whom Mailer also refers to as the hipster. White hipsters were attracted to the way in which black males disregarded social conventions for instant gratification, and those hipsters who were not familiar with the black lifestyle borrowed only selected elements in their pursuit of the black existence:

> One could hardly maintain the courage to be individual, to speak with one's own voice, for the years in which one could complacently accept oneself as a part of an elite by being a radical were forever gone. A man knew that when he dissented, he gave a note upon his life which could be called in any year of overt crisis. No wonder then that these have been the years of conformity and depression. A stench of fear has come out of fear has come out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve. The only courage, with rare exceptions, that we have been witness to, has been the isolated courage of an isolated people. (Ibid. 2)

Jealous of the "freedom" of the black lifestyle, hipsters were those white people who saw desegregation for what it really was. They were "a new breed of ... urban adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man's code to fit their facts. The hipster had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes, could be considered a white Negro" (ibid. 4). However, as with the warning heeded earlier by Carla Freccero, Mailer alerts his readers about inauthentic hipsters: to be a "real existentialist" one must really feel and explore the roots of their existential philosophy (1957: 5-6). Hipsters must be aware of how and why society has evolved as it has, and what political, social, and economic changes in society have meant for blacks in America. While one may not be able to relate personally to these experiences, it is important to sympathize through a level of understanding marked only by the "dedicated hipsters."

EMINEM AND HIP-HOP COOL

Eminem's emergence onto the hip-hop scene has created an interesting dilemma for the hip-hop community. Eminem could be seen as the American existentialist as

Mailer defines it, a dedicated hipster, or as he is often labelled (wrongly, in my opinion) a wigger. Wiggers are those white individuals who adopt with the images depicted in rap lyrics and videos but do not identify with other aspects of blackness (I say more on wiggers later in this chapter). As cool is classified as a rebellious attitude against the norms and values of society, and because one of the key aspects of hip-hop cool is rooted in the hard urban environment and lower-class existence, Eminem has the personal background that would allow him to use hip-hop cool successfully. Like the rappers before him, Eminem bases much of his own cool on his attitude toward the dominant groups in society, adopts a detachment from society, and, through his lyrics, shows his opposition to pressures from the dominant structure. For instance, he describes his attitude toward society on "Just Don't Give a Fuck," one of his first hit singles:

> So when you see me on your block with two glocks
> Screamin' "Fuck the World" like Tupac
> I just don't give a fuuuuuck!!! [...]
> So put my tape back on the rack
> Go run and tell your friends my shit is wack
> I just don't give a fuuuuuck!!!

Through lyrics such as this, it is possible to see mirror reflections of the Beastie Boys and Vanilla Ice in Eminem's rhymes. It might be easy to conclude that he only employs a spirit of punk rebelliousness (like the Beastie Boys) and identifies with the negative aspects of blackness through his own street-based antics (like Vanilla Ice). However, as I have indicated, Eminem does not use these features of rap alone. He also directs some of his anger toward those people who refuse to see him as a "real" member of the hip-hop community and propose his whiteness as a reason for exclusion. In many of his songs therefore Eminem discusses the ways in which negative attitudes towards white rappers restricted and restrained his own career in the hip-hop community: "Some people only see that I'm white, ignorin' skill/Cause I stand out like a green hat with an orange bill/But I don't get pissed, y'all don't even see through the mist/How the fuck can I be white? I don't even exist" ("Role Model").

Considering Nelson George's (1998: 55) assertion that though "hip-hop's values are by and large fixed — its spirit of rebellion, identification with street culture, materialism, and aggression — it is also an incredibly flexible tool of communication, quite adaptable to any number of messages," Eminem's word choices in "Role Model"

take on an interesting meaning. While insignificance and non-existence are usually the reality of black struggles, Eminem could be seen, here, as describing the trials and tribulations of poor whites and that of white emcees. Since poverty is usually associated with blackness, Eminem's poverty (and that of other white people) does not usually get the "attention" it deserves. Furthermore, Em can also be seen as voicing the concerns of a white existence in hip-hop. Eminem's message differs greatly from the traditional messages from black rap artists about police abuses of power and racial-profiling, but it is delivered in such a manner that Eminem's "non-existence" is related to the urban black experience: his rap skills are ignored, in a manner that recalls the dismissal of young, black job-seekers. Just like some individuals who are identified as criminals by some members of society because of their skin colour, Eminem's race makes him an instant target for criticism from hip-hop traditionalists, although this criticism is a different kind.

While most in the hip-hop community have embraced Eminem openly, one of the more serious issues he raises touches on issues of appropriation. McLaren (1999: 48) sees the white interest in hip-hop in more positive terms because "rap music ... invades the white world and steals white kids ... [and] teaches white kids about racism and power. ... [It] supplies white youth with an alternative vocabulary in which to articulate their rebellion against the parental authority structure." On the other hand, bell hooks sees this fascination with blackness as a sign of white privilege, contending that white kids who want to be black "'see' blackness and black culture from a standpoint where only the rich culture of opposition black people have created in resistance marks and defines us" (1992: 158). This can be related back to some of my earlier discussions of two-ness (DuBois), blacklash (Davis), and Mailer's assertion that blacks began to engage in behaviour that explored the so-called "innate" qualities that were assigned to them. All four scholars criticize a singular view of blacks. Much of the black middle-class's frustrations with black youth come from the fascination with *the* blackness which has been popularized by hip-hop culture, and which ignores other blacknesses: for example, that of the middle and upper-classes and the lower-class who live within the means of the law. Because most whites do not understand the historical and social conditions behind the rebelliousness associated with blackness, their adoption of such cultural forms is misplaced and misused.

hooks' (1992: 157) critique of Madonna's use of black culture can be applied to Eminem equally: "if people of colour do not have equal access to cultural production on a mass media scale, then representation is always a representation by the other, a 'speaking for someone else,' a ventriloquizing that silences those represented." Thus, while some see the promotion of black images in popular cultural forms as positive, others see Madonna's portrayals negatively since they do not promote a "connection" to blackness. Instead, this kind of fascination turns blackness into a desirable object: "the thing about envy is that it is always ready to destroy, take-over, and consume the desired object" (ibid. 157). Freccero offers an alternative view, which is equally critical. She does not dispute that some representations of blacks by outsiders are negative and exploitative (Vanilla Ice), but at the same time, she reiterates that simply being black does not give a person the right knowledge to use black cultural forms. As my own summaries of the careers of both Fresh Prince and MC Hammer suggest: "it is important to realize that the identity of the cultural producer will not necessarily guarantee the production of 'good' representations" (Freccero 1999: 63).

The concerns bell hooks expresses about white fascination turning the negative stereotypes of blackness into a desirable object, however, are legitimate and deserve further consideration in relation to Eminem and the impact he has had on hip-hop and the music industry at large. Before Dr. Dre signed Eminem, hip-hop music's popularity was nowhere near the levels it has reached at the time of my writing this chapter. The murders of 2Pac and Biggie Smalls, two of its biggest and most talented stars in the mid-1990s, had practically destroyed the hip-hop industry. When Eminem burst out of Detroit's underground, hip-hop was looking for a star who could match the skill-level of 2Pac and the presence of Biggie Smalls, and since his 1999 breakthrough album, *The Slim Shady LP*, it could be argued that Eminem has filled those voids. In fact, one could also argue, (although I am uncertain about where to find valid proof in favour of this) that Eminem contributed to the heightened interest in rap music. That he is regarded as a hip-hop megastar, and is arguably the music genre's only "credible" pop-star, could be seen as status that is available only to Eminem because he is white.

We might also consider the ways in which Eminem makes it easier for white, suburban kids to listen to rap music. White kids might have felt some uncertainty about

listening to Snoop Dogg or Ice Cube, two black rappers whose concerns do not have a personal connection to their lives and are somewhat foreign to them, but Eminem is white — just like they are. Since he raps about the resistance to accepting whites as true hip-hop fans and states that white people can enjoy hip-hop just as much as people of colour, the fan's issues are his concerns and vice-versa. To his credit, Eminem acknowledges that his widespread appeal is due in part to his whiteness, which offers him a unique position in hip-hop. Even though Eminem's rhymes often stress the fact that despite appearances, his childhood experiences and life as a struggling rapper differentiate him from most of his fans, he is still aware of the connections between his whiteness and success:

> The fact that I'm white is probably the reason that I sold double the records I should have. I'm not saying anything different than any rapper has said, NWA or Ice-T. It's just that when a white face is saying it, these white kids connect with it. I reached into them homes of middle America because white kids, not to say they should or shouldn't have, looked up to me and connected with me because they looked like me. (Parker 2002: 118).

It is too easy to discredit Eminem's high record sales on the basis of his colour. Since Eminem's success, a number of white rappers have emerged and (in the case of Vanilla Ice) re-emerged on the hip-hop scene, and not one of them has come close to matching what Eminem has achieved. Bubba Sparxxx, who was recruited and produced by Timbaland (producer for Missy Elliot and Aaliyah), is probably the most recognizable among this recent wave of white rappers. He made a splash with his first single "Ugly" but, since then, really has not had much of an impact in rap music. On the other hand, Bubba Sparxxx relies on a working-class, Southern white-trash appeal (the music video for "Ugly" was distinctly Southern, featuring pigs and tractor racing), rather than coming across as an urban thug. White and Cones III (1999: 109) explain why Eminem's appeal is greater than that of Bubba Sparxxx: "[these kids] can vicariously pick up a slice of what is passed on as authentic blackness without interacting directly with Black homeboys in the inner-city. In their cars, they can hear the blasting rhymes of the Black ghetto without going near it."

Todd Boyd offers an interesting way of assessing hip-hop cool in relation to insider/outsider status. For Boyd, hip-hop cool is characterized by defiance of the restrictive dimensions of the status quo by "truly disadvantaged" products of the ghetto and the urban environment's underground capitalist economy (1997: 31-33, 40). Thus, he

makes the argument that blackness can be a state of mind with which all oppressed individuals can identify: identification with blackness is therefore based "on the extent of [the] association with lower-class African-American existence." As Freccero (1999: 63-4) points out, this criterion of belonging that see blacks as the only "true" disadvantaged strata in society becomes contentious:

> the commonsense notion ... is that an outsider's representation will be a misrepresentation, that is, it will be inaccurate and distorted, whereas an insider's representation will be true and accurate. ... To assume automatically that an outsider's point of view is inaccurate or wrong is to buy into the notion of culture as something that no one 'outside' it can understand.

Manifested through the cool pose, the hip-hop style of dress seizes and deploys such negative stereotypes of lower-class black urban youth within the mainstream. As Sartwell argues, one of the most effective ways of overcoming the American racial dichotomy is to meet it head on, to make it visible as often and in as many locations as possible (1998: 160). As an outright rejection of the dominant culture, this style can also seen as a dismissal of the values that are associated with the dominant culture and as a signifier of the stereotype of black of deviance: "[t]he criminalized urban youth is then identified and labelled as the sponsor of innate violence. Their clothing style, language use, radios, body language, and what is assumed as their general disregard for social norms and mores becomes a part of what is defined as 'inner-city youth culture' " (Kinshasa 1997: 292). Similarly, as Bruzzi (1997: 107) states:

> Black dress has traditionally become defined as symbolic of opposition because it offers a visual challenge to the dominant white class of dress and openly defies, through its studied opulence, the social position a racist society has allocated its black community. In this sense, the complexities of black street clothes signal a social fissure and a desire to affirm and articulate racial identity.

Dick Hebdige (in Bruzzi 1997: 109) argues that the hip-hop style is a way of reconstructing blackness in opposition to the (white) normative culture, while Kinshasa (1997: 292) further sees this style as an outright rejection of both the dominant culture and the values and traditions that are associated with it. The hip-hop style has become symptomatic of opposition to the dominant and normative culture, regardless of the race of those deploying it: "black culture has become representative of the alternative culture in opposition to mainstream norms" (Roediger 1998: 358). These assessments thus open

up space for Eminem and other poor white people who feel the same disdain for the normative culture that keeps them locked into a life of poverty. However, as McLaren (1999: 47) explains, it is not so much that whites are borrowing black culture, but that most tend to borrow select parts of it, usually the elements that portray blacks in negative terms, without obtaining any knowledge of the roots of those elements.

Wiggers, as the newer generation of these individuals are called, tend to identity with the violence, scatology, and sexism contained within rap lyrics, rather than relating to the positive elements of blackness. They are seen as leaning toward the primal views of black males that are now more pronounced than they were during the blues and jazz eras, when whites were attracted to the soulfullness of black music and culture (Roediger 1998: 361-2). Roediger examines this through theories of cultural hybridity in the US, and concludes:

> Hybridity, in a highly unequal society, has as often been the product of tragic, tawdry, and exploitative forces as of romantic ones. Whether we judge the beauty and solidarity created by the crossing of cultural color lines in the interstices of racial capitalism to outweigh the associated slights and tragedies is on one level immaterial. The process goes on, superficially and at times deeply. If to abdicate studying it were only to abdicate understanding that mythical thing called "white culture," the consequences would be bearable. But such an abdication also entails giving up on understanding American culture and African American culture, the latter having as one of its essential elements the ability to borrow creatively from others and to create hybrid forms.

Robin D. Givan sees wiggers in a positive light. Arguing that the crossing of cultural lines should never be seen in negative terms, especially given the racial dichotomy in the US, Givan believes that wiggers can actually help to improve race relations because they attempt to understand and relate to "what makes some African Americans groove" (Givan 1993: 1-D). Thus, Givan concludes, "crossing cultural lines [is] ... a lot more stylish than anything you can buy off the rack."

The racialization of cool is linked to the hip-hop lifestyle, which itself is defined by street credibility and an oppositional attitude that are ground in a culture of violence. While previous forms of cool emphasized a form of inhibited resistance, hip-hop cool with its emphasis on gun, gangs, and the inner-city lifestyle, has made the expression of rage cool. White youth, intrigued by hip-hop cool's preoccupation with violence, have fallen for hip-hop cool just as their parents' generation fell for the cool in Shaft, and their

grandparents, for the cool of jazz and blues performers. For whites, black forms of cool mark opposition to the expectations (of parents, church, schooling, and the pursuit of the "American dream" of family and financial security) that they are often forced to follow. Thus, the use of black cool is more than an expression of youth rebellion. It can be seen as a way of expressing concern for situational and institutional processes that limit the potential of black youth. The white adoption of hip-hop cool is a constant reminder that no matter how many restraints are placed upon it and its creators, black culture will usually capture youthful imaginations.

Notes

[1] Doug E. Fresh is the New York rapper recognized as the original human beat box and is the individual who popularized the use of voice as a hip-hop instrument.

CHAPTER 2: EMINEM IN THE NEWS: RAISIN' HAVOC AND PLAYIN' THE MEDIA GAME

> *It's all about interpretation of the lyrics. ... The media gets bored very easily and every now and then they need somebody to talk about. For a minute it was Marilyn Manson, and every time you opened a magazine or turned on the TV it was like, Fuck Marilyn Manson! He worships Satan and he's not a good role model for kids and blah blah blah. I don't understand this concept that everybody making music has to be a positive role model for kids.*
> — Eminem[1]

Whether it is John Lennon protesting against the Viet Nam War, the Rolling Stones' open drug use, Elvis Presley's gyrating, lower-body movements, or the aggressive postures of NWA, it seems that musicians are often blamed for the disrespect shown by children towards the standards of "straight" society. While a rebellious attitude is not essential to a performer's success with young fans (as is obvious with the chart-topping successes of bubble-gum artists), a disconnection in attitude and style will only increase the appeal for youth who are looking for an external outlet for their own discontentment. The appearances of such attitudes, and the kind of open, in-your-face rebellion that appeals to younger, white children, makes musicians the instant targets of political, cultural, and media critics. Consequently, black musical forms, such as blues, jazz, and currently, hip-hop (which, during the heights of their popularity, became the "standards" of deviancy in US society) have come under the attack of members of these various groups, who fear that their children are vulnerable to the purported insubordinate attitudes of these musicians. Thus, Eminem's assessment of the media, albeit simplistic, is an adequate way of examining the heavy scrutiny most musicians face because of the messages they are perceived as sending (subliminally and explicitly) to young listeners.

Rappers are the most recent artists to gain the attention of political and cultural critics. With rap songs that promote criminal activities and "getting yours" by any means necessary, hip-hop culture has raised the ire of the dominant groups that fear rap's potential to influence new generations of children. This deviant attitude is essential to the hip-hop image. The majority of rappers are young blacks and this attitude is derived from the negative reception of black males from non-black members of society. Thus, rather than accept exclusion passively, black males take control and separate themselves from society before this can take place without their control. This distance from the dominant culture may be expressed in a number of ways, such as the rapper's adoption of a stance

which is "cool" but nevertheless does not appear as that of a "poser." Cool, for gangsta rappers, is any trait that promotes the *appearance* of a criminal or gangbanging lifestyle. Unfortunately, these "criminal" activities have also come to represent all of hip-hop, thus characterizing the whole culture in negative terms. The real-life criminal activities of some rap artists aside, hip-hop culture tends to be vilified by those sources that are seen to represent the dominant culture, such as daily newspapers and news magazines.

While hip-hop culture does have its own media sources, the most well-known of which is *The Source*, treatment of hip-hop in news-related magazines and mainstream newspapers tends to maintain hip-hop's "outsider" status, seeing it as contrary to the values of the "real" or normative class. Thus, while each media source interprets rappers through their defiant stances, their respective views on hip-hop culture remain opposed. The hip-hop and music press pass judgement on rappers who have been absorbed by the values of society; consequently, rappers who maintain a rebellious disconnection from societal conventions are not only more respected, but are praised for such attitudes. The mainstream press also view hip-hop artists as oppositional, despite variations in their attachment to social norms, but oppositionality is cast in negative terms.

In this chapter, I examine how these conflicting interpretations produce and challenge the image of Eminem's Slim Shady persona. While each medium has a unique way of interpreting Eminem, his music, and the subjects of his raps, there is a tendency in music and hip-hop media to see beyond the controversy that has been created through coverage of him in other media and a preference for examining Eminem's skills and what he brings to hip-hop. A familiar pattern, wherein rap music comes to be blamed for the degeneration of white youth, persists to the present day. This not only contributes to the myth making of Em's personas, but is also grounded within the stereotypical "deep-structure binaries"[2] through which hip-hop culture has always been evaluated. Even though journalists are now becoming more familiar with hip-hop, media sources rarely concur in their interpretations of rap lyrics, the impact of the actions of rap artists, or the value of hip-hop's culture in general (hip-hop media can be included here). Moreover, despite the slight erasure of the boundary between hip-hop culture and that of the dominant structure, rap is still interpreted by many as an oppositional force that provides the alienated with an expressive outlet for their concerns. As a result, rap's middle-class

white fans are seen as rebelling against the values of their parents' generation; and, hip-hop itself becomes what McLaren (1999. 25) calls "fashionable deviancy" which turns the demonization of hip-hop culture into a positive attribute.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF HIP-HOP MEDIA COVERAGE

Ever since hip-hop began to gain the attention of youth outside of the inner-city, media coverage of hip-hop culture and its artists has been a divisive issue. As rap often attacks the dominant culture for the limits it places on members of the underclass and for activities that are contrary to acceptable norms, hip-hop culture, in turn, tends to generate a lot of negative attention from most media. Rappers now face even more of this kind of attention, since hip-hop music is reaching a fan base outside of the confines of the inner-city. Those individuals who have appointed themselves as society's "protectors" often voice their collective concerns about what they perceive as the ill effects of hip-hop music and culture, calling upon rap artists to write lyrics more responsibly since it is mostly white children who are consuming their products. Julia Elkund Koza (1999) and Patrick B. Hill (1999) each conducted individual studies of the early media coverage of hip-hop culture and rap music.[3] Upon completion of their research, both Hill and Elkund Koza arrived at similar conclusions concerning the media's understanding of hip-hop cultural forms. For instance, each found that hip-hop/rap articles appearing in non-music-related sections were usually more negative when covered by city or national news staff (Hill 1999: 103 and Elkund Koza 1999: 71).

Furthermore, another finding in Hill's and Elkund Koza's results was articles that equated blackness with "bad" because it encompasses everything that whiteness does not (i.e. blacks are short-tempered and aggressive, hence whites are calm and peaceful).[4] Whiteness now becomes "good" because it is the polar opposite of the "bad" associated with blackness: "[r]ap's appeal to whites rested in its evocation of an age-old image of blackness: a foreign, sexually charged, and criminal underworld against which the norms of whiteness are defined, and by extension through which they may be defied" (Samuels 1991: 25). As Hill (1999: 104) describes, this kind of vilification of blacks, and of black males especially, is due to the need to explain social ills. In defining blackness as an undesirable Other, cultural and political critics are thus able to define the traditions (and

cultural forms) associated with blackness as likewise undesirable. This differs from previous "othering" theories because "consuming the 'other,' in this case listening to rap music, [becomes] a transgressive act, performed in defiance of dominant white norms" (Elkund Koza 1999: 89).

bell hooks examines this kind of Othering in terms of the commodification of Other (1992: 25-6). Through appropriation and commodification, the primitive notions of blackness become the "standard" to which whiteness is compared. This kind of Othering makes blackness more exciting and dangerous (ibid. 26) and, as indicated above, suggests that whiteness, in comparison, is safe, reliable, and unthreatening. By extension, rap music, which is usually seen as the primary means of expression for young African-Americans, becomes contrary to the moral standards set by society's dominant group. These efforts to vilify blacks and blackness, Hill argues, can be used to gain a greater understanding of how "anxieties at the nexus of race, class, and generational difference continue to animate the story world of American social relations" (1999: 104).

hooks (1992: 25) has also argued that rap music is a way of examining Otherness in relation to the alienation felt by the (young) listener: "[m]asses of young people dissatisfied by US imperialism, unemployment, [and] lack of economic opportunity ... can be manipulated by cultural strategies that offer Otherness as appeasement, particularly through commodification." As Stallybrass and White (1986: 200-01) argue, this kind of transgression can be seen as a reversal or a counter-subliminal attempt to unravel discourses of domination, undoing the hierarchies set by the bourgeois society, and thus challenging the dominant power relations. According to hooks, however these transgressive acts may appear, they do not empower the Other. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation* she argues that negative stereotypes of race groups are reinforced because race becomes commodified for pleasure, which "constitut[es] the culture of specific groups, and the bodies of individuals, as an alternative to the dominant and normative culture" (1992: 23).

ISSUES CONCERNING THE MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF HIP-HOP

Hip-hop, as the most commodified black cultural form, becomes viewed in negative terms because of this emphasis placed on it as an Other. Rappers, and the

subjects of hip-hop music, have become vulnerable targets[5] within African-American culture; the protection of First Amendment (free speech) rights has thus become the focus of African-American political/cultural issues. First Amendment issues for black musicians receive such significant media coverage that they have come to be seen as the only issue of concern for blacks; the focus on censorship of hip-hop music thus keeps black Americans in a perpetual defensive mode. As a result, due to the heavy emphasis that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) place on music censorship, other more pressing issues concerning blackness, such as three strikes laws, attacks on affirmative action policies, mistreatment of those living in poverty, and education rights take a back seat to the fight against censorship (Wright 2002: 104). However, hip-hop media also tend to devote more energy to freedom of speech issues. As *The Source* focuses primarily on the contributions that rap artists make to hip-hop culture, the rights of those artists to express their opinions freely would be an important issue. The problem is that some hip-hop activists are devoting so much energy to the protection of rappers that the rights of others in the hip-hop/black community may be overlooked: "[w]e need a political platform that addresses the *multiple* attacks that have been levelled against our generation" (ibid. 104, emphasis added).

Such censorship attempts send clear messages to hip-hop's young (black) listeners who feel a connection to rap lyrics: 1) their feelings on poverty, social and institutional racism, and deprivation are not important enough to remain on the social agenda, 2) their opinions are harmful to other children, and, 3) when such concerns are expressed they must be silenced. Critics of rap and hip-hop launch their attack on rap based upon a sense of moral outrage, but refrain from looking at urban poverty, racism, and sexism in other sectors of society with the same ire they reserve for rappers. Slayden (1999: 37) points out that the moral cultural criticism and "suggestions" to "improve" rap content are problematic for two reasons. First, they conceptualize culture as a territory that can be taken over by an other, reclaimed, and remade into "our" own, like colonizing countries that take over the culture of their colonized. Second, such language use describes the values of the "Other" as contrary to "our" morals, that is, the morals of the dominant group. This further insinuates that certain behaviours and situations are the fault of this Other, and not due to social conditions. Michael Franti,[6] leader of Spearhead, believes

that moral criticism launched at blacks, hip-hop culture, and rap music is unsubstantiated:

> Rap didn't start the phenomenon of people killing each other or mistreating women in our community. Education and welfare cuts and a buildup of jails has more to do with it. ... Nobody got mad when Eric Clapton sang "I Shot the Sheriff." You've got *The Terminator*, a whole movie about blowing cops to bits, and there's Arnold Schwarzernegger posing with George Bush. It's hypocrisy. (Gunderson 1994: 4D)

We can refer to the theory of oppressive representations to examine the media's coverage of hip-hop culture. The theory was put forth originally by Fiske (1987) and examines how certain deep-structure binaries (for example: good/bad or right/wrong) are often extended to concrete representations within societal structures such as light/dark, order/lawlessness, and upper-middle class/underclass. Fiske borrows from Barthes to explain how these mythical binaries serve the dominant class, who, not surprisingly, are those individuals who fall on the left side of the comparison (ibid. 132). In her study, Elkund Koza also found that that coverage of hip-hop tended to support this theory by equating rap music with poverty, and in turn, by associating poverty with blackness.[7] As one might assume, rap was also associated with the negative, and compared to an imaginary "other" (presumably whiteness). Much of the basis for such representations can be related to the perception from some media that "industrial societies assume a national cultural consensus. Implicit within this notion is the assumption that individuals within the nation share common frameworks of meaning and interpretations" (Hill 1999: 105). Some of rap's values, such as rugged individualism and materialism, are linked to these common frameworks; however, it is the way in which rappers acquire or express these values that many critics condemn. Elkund Koza explains: "[e]vidence of inside/outside binaries was in abundance in comments about rappers' race and social class, the binaries taking the form of high/low, good/bad, here/there, and up/down. Rap was usually associated with the right side of the virgule, and with lack or want" (ibid. 73).

While these comparisons are usually drawn out through a white/black binary, this does not hold true for articles appearing in the mainstream, non-specialist media that assess Eminem. Instead, reporters try to dissociate Eminem from the lifestyle associated with white behaviour and white values. Eminem may be white but he is often described as an "angry young man" (Rose 2000: W12) who was raised in a dysfunctional family (Case 2001b). The numerous failed relationships in his family, a history of deadbeat fathers and

familial violence are also offered to show that Eminem is not representative of a typical white American (ibid.). Moreover, Eminem's poverty-stricken, fatherless childhood spent moving around various *black* neighbourhoods in Detroit is given as a reason for the anger he expresses through his rap songs (Elrick 2000). In fact, Eminem's underclass childhood often comes off as related to white or trailer park trash, further distancing him from the values of the dominant structure. Through coverage that associates his childhood poverty with undesirable lifestyle choices as an adult, Eminem is still linked with the right side of Elkund Koza's binary, associating him with the same negative imagery for members of the black underclass. His bad boy image is not only upheld through all of these associations, but it is also perpetuated, since these images of him have become a part of the popular imagination surrounding his public personas. Furthermore, in ignoring the work of black rappers whose raps should have a similar impact on critics, reporters feed into the negative images of black cultural forms that permeate society's dominant group: "[i]f we are to turn down the volume on hate-filled lyrics, we need a broad cultural discussion of the impact of the music on the hearts and minds of our young. ... To shine a spotlight on Eminem without giving equal time to black rappers whose lyrics are just as wounding, sends the wrong message to our kids and society" (Bowling 2001).

Although Elkund Koza does not go as far as to discuss the after effects of such media coverage, Lipsitz's 1998 essay could be seen as an extension of her work. In looking at the 1994 hip-hop hearings,[8] Lipsitz examines how the still on-going censorship debate(s) over the censorship of lyrics are played out in a (neo)conservative political context. In my opinion, since Lipsitz pays considerable heed to the concerns about rap's promotion of disrespect for some of society's other marginalized groups, namely women and homosexuals, he considers both sides of this debate adequately. In the end, he argues that the debates over song lyrics serve only to divert attention from the ways in which certain elements of the neoconservative political agenda, such as deindustrialization and economic restructuring, have driven a wedge between generations of all ethnicities (1998: 395). Lipsitz thus argues that censorship of rap lyrics is an attempt to distract people from other issues (ibid. 104), just as Wright claimed in the article in *The Source* (2002: 101-104). Since most of the people who want to censor rap music are either politicians or representatives of special interest groups, it is apparent that hip-hop culture and its music

are being made into the scapegoats for a situation created by institutional policies.

Those familiar with hip-hop culture often describe rap music as registering the plight and subordination of inner-city youth, and rap artists as the deliverers of such messages. The attempted censorship of rap, therefore, can be seen as a way of trying to erase the strong connection between rap and the social conditions of the urban underclass, conditions that have been blamed on government over-action (extensive tax burden) or government in-action (inadequate number or weakness of social policies).[9] Those who support censorship are fearful that the impressionable listeners of rap music will start to empathize with the black experience and take up this behaviour themselves (Houchin Winfield 1999: 13). While some of the issues about the content of rap songs are legitimate concerns, as the studies by Elkund Koza (1999) and Lipsitz (1998) indicate, rap's critics tend to overlook the poetics or actual context of the violent lyrics. They shift the focus away from the rappers' messages, and instead level criticism at subject matter that "threatens" society. As Robin D. G. Kelley (1994: 190) states:

> Throughout the sustained censorship campaign against hip-hop, rap artists and their defenders have conceded that the music's lyrics are sometimes obscene, sometimes celebratory about violence, and sometimes sexist and misogynist. They do point out, however, that critics often forget that rap lyrics use metaphors — Ice-T's "Grand Larceny" is actually about "stealing" a show and that his "I'm Your Pusher" is an anti-drug song celebrating "dope beats" and lyrics with "no beepers needed.

The point Kelley makes is that hip-hop critics rarely notice these language intricacies, or if they do, choose not to mention them in their analyses of rap music. This kind of criticism is consistent with Eminem's work because the content of his songs are often pulled away from the context and literary devices he employs to convey his satirical messages. Furthermore, in criticizing Eminem, critics usually pick out one or two lines from his albums and refer back to that repeatedly to make their case about Eminem's rhymes. "Kill You" for instance, is one of the songs from *The Marshall Mathers LP* that received the most attention because Eminem repeats the phrase, "You don't wanna fuck with Shady/Cause Shady, will fuckin kill you." Despite the satirical tone to this song, and even though the rest of the album contains lines that are more positive, this line and song are most often cited from the album. Former US President Bill Clinton's 1995 State of the Union Address is a perfect example of how critics often do not consider all elements of

rap songs:

> For the people in the entertainment industry ... we applaud your creativity and your worldwide success, and we support your freedom of expression. But you do have a responsibility to assess the impact of your work and to understand the damage that comes from incessant, repetitive mindless violence and irresponsible conduct that permeates our media all the time. (Clinton 1995)

The problem with criticizing hip-hop artists for their content is that sometimes message rappers, who target policies for the mistreatment of blacks, become lost in the "target rap" shuffle. Their work differs from gangsta rap in a variety of ways and criticizing them in the same breath as gangsta rappers[10] could come off as a political targeting of their positive messages (Bowling 2001). With Eminem, however, the situation is different. Since he is white "his critics don't have to fear any racial fallout" (Hammer 2000), Eminem therefore becomes a "safe scapegoat" because of his whiteness. In fact, in non-hip-hop media, Eminem has come to represent all rappers. Whenever they need to demonstrate the negative aspects of rap music, they quote Em, often out of context, but are "reluctant to criticize black rappers for fear of being called racists" (ibid.). Such calls for censorship of Em's work also raise significant issues of racism, because, as Darrel Bowling (2001) points out, this sends a disturbing message about the low behavioural expectations placed on black youth. Since other rappers like Dre, Jay-Z and Xzibit are rarely targeted, this could be seen as an indication that disrespecting (black) women and enacting physical harm on other (black) kids is not as serious an issue as is Eminem's disrespect for the white women in his life and the other white individuals whom he dislikes.

THEY WANNA GROW UP TO BE JUST LIKE EM

Both the hip-hop and non-hip-hop media have each played an important role in the development of Eminem's star status. Even more intriguing than the differing analyses in mainstream and hip-hop/music media is the way in which Eminem operates in teen-pop culture. Despite his numerous stabbing jabs at pop-music's stars and fans, Eminem still has a very large pop following and has been on the covers of the same magazines that have been designed for teenaged girls looking for the latest pin-up to stick on their bedroom walls or in their lockers at school. In the last three years, Eminem has

graced the pages of nearly every American magazine from *The Source*, *Spin*, and *Rolling Stone* to *Newsweek, Cosmopolitan*, and even *Teen*. It is even safe to estimate that Em has been mentioned at least once in every daily newspaper in Canada and the United States. He has even found his way onto trash TV, in the form of an entire episode of *Sally Jessy Raphael* ("Eminem ... Love Him or Hate Him?"), debating the impact of his lyrics, and featuring his younger brother, their mother, and the irate mother of a young Eminem fan.[11]

The unprecedented success of Eminem's *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000) catapulted Eminem into the limelight. Every thing he said and did came under heavy media scrutiny, most of which was negative. Since the album's release, it has sold more than eight million units in the US, selling close to 2 million copies during its debut week. This explosion in sales won Eminem airplay on mainstream radio stations (albeit with versions of his songs that are edited severely), MTV (a US-television station that airs music videos and appeals to young music fans), BET (Black Entertainment Television, US-television station that is popular among young fans of hip-hop culture), and *Saturday Night Live*, a weekly show on NBC that features popular artists. Eminem has even become one of the most requested artists on MTV's *Total Request Live*, a show where teen fans call in to request their favourite music videos. He receives just as much airtime as his much-hated pop competitors, such as Britney Spears, *NSYNC, and Christina Aguilera.

It is at this point, when Eminem has become a huge success in the teen and mainstream music markets, that his status as a social deviant has become even more important to maintaining his success and credibility within hip-hop circles. Ironically enough, Eminem does not have to do much to maintain this status since much of the coverage does this work for him. Not only is Eminem often seen viewed in terms of the traits associated with his fictional Slim Shady alter ego but media coverage often goes a step further by making him into a scapegoat for the supposed increases in youth violence, deviance, and transgression ("Lynne" 2001). Eminem has politicians, critics, and parents in an uproar, which, of course, serves only to make him more popular with teens. Even as his mainstream, pop-commodity status increases, as he becomes more deviant through the media, he also becomes more appealing to his teen fans.

The coverage that points to Eminem as deviant overlooks the rich history of hip-hop culture, and perpetuates an elitist understanding that draws on negative stereotypes long associated with blackness. According to Elkund Koza (1999: 65), this problem can be resolved only if we look at rap and hip-hop culture as significant cultural artifacts: "[i]gnoring or denouncing popular culture — the culture of the people — sends elitist messages about whose understandings of the world do or do not count, both in schools and in the dominant culture. ... Furthermore, popular culture sometimes serves as a venue for cultural critique, specifically of institutions and the power regimes that support them." She further explains why the appearance of rap in non-music sections of newspapers or non-music magazines perpetuates the power relations of society's dominant structure:

> Placing discussions of rap in categories other than the music/arts sections contributed to a construction of rap as a sociological phenomenon, as political discourse, or as reportage, rather than as an art form, and thus it changed the terms in which rap was discussed. Regardless of whether articles appeared in or out of the arts/music section, however, there was very little discussion of the music itself, aside from the lyrics. ... These absences further contributed to rap's construction as a sociological phenomenon, subject to intense social analysis. (Ibid. 71)

While the hype around Eminem fuels the fire of those groups who believe his work should be censored, thus making him more appealing to teen fans, I still believe that it is debatable that this kind of coverage is *the* reason for Eminem's pop-icon status. That being said, I do not think that we can isolate Eminem's pop-star status from the way in which he is received by teen media sources. It is indeed quite unusual that a hardcore rapper would appear on the covers of these magazines and still maintain a strong hold on his hip-hop connection. It is interesting to see how the teen magazines use his bad boy image (Slim Shady), his playful and vulnerable sides (Marshall Mathers), and his image as a hip-hop performer (Eminem) differently from mainstream newspapers or hip-hop magazines.

In teen magazines, such as *Teen People, Twist,* and *Teen*, Eminem's contradictory traits are employed in a manner that would make him more appealing to teenage girls. Playing upon the belief that the "real Eminem" is not as malevolent as other media claim, these magazines use his bullied youth to illicit pity and sympathy from their readers, describing Eminem as a "loner" with few friends and a "sensitive child in a tough city

where the bigger kids just loved knocking the little kids around" ("Em" 2001: 10-11). Eminem also comes across as a loyal, fun-loving, easy-going, well-balanced person, who is also a "romantic at heart" ("Not" 2001: 19). Furthermore, one magazine even emphasized Eminem's perceived shyness and insecurities (traits that could be attractive to self-conscious teenaged girls) and downplayed his volatile relationship with his ex-wife Kim (Brown 2000: 78).

While these articles do play into the teenage girl's attraction to a "sensitive guy," indicating that much of what Eminem does is performance, they also remind readers that the lines between his real life and fictional personas are often blurred ("Eminem" 2001: 41-44). As in the article in *Teen People*, the writers spew off facts about how many albums Em has sold and how his star has risen without discussing how his rapping talents both link him to, and distance him, from contemporary rappers (Brown 2000: 77-8). This may grow out of a desire to distance him from the hardness of hip-hop culture. Even a simple search on the Internet shows how much of the popular teen imagination Eminem now claims. I ran a few searches on the Internet search engines, *Google*, *Yahoo!*, and *Yahoo!Clubs* (on-line member clubs devoted to the stars). In all but one case, the number of hits I came across simply from typing in "Eminem" outnumbers those for "Britney Spears," "Christina Aguilera," and even the most popular members of the boy bands. Moreover, the number of web sites devoted to male heartthrobs *NSYNC's "Justin Timberlake" and Backstreet Boy "Nick Carter" *combined* are often less than the number for Eminem.[12]

THE MAINSTREAM SCAPEGOAT

In 2001 alone, Eminem has been labelled as everything from a brilliant lyricist and gifted storyteller (Delingpole 2001: B3) to a societal misfit, hell-bent on advocating violence toward women and homosexuals (Pitts jr. 2001). Consequently, the different opinions of the content of his lyrics have stirred serious debate since he made his major-label debut with *The Slim Shady LP* (1999). Those who want his music censored cite his glorification of crime and the way he addresses women and homosexuals as causing major divisions in society ("Vice President's" 2001). His supporters, on the other hand, in stating that form is often a more telling indicator of talent than the content in the rap

songs, argue that Eminem highlights the social disintegration in urban America that most people would rather not face ("Madonna, Elton" 2001).

Eminem further subverts these stereotypes through rapping about his experiences of poverty and deprivation thus showing that the deviant, cool and societal misfit traits are not limited to members of the black underclass. Moreover, by not only *not* ignoring his whiteness, but by mentioning it frequently, he impels members of the dominant class to see hip-hop culture as more of a central feature of a national, US culture, rather than a subversion of the "norm." In fact, each time a media source notices something that is going on in Em's life, and adds it to the content of their paper or magazine, this intensifies the fascination and mystery around Eminem (Case 2001a and Dickson 2000). Houchin Winfield explains through an analogy to rapper 2Pac, which produces responses similar to those confronting Eminem: "The more confrontational ['Pac] was, the more newsworthy he was, and the more his releases sold. To some he became a hero; to others a demon" (1999: 17). Since hip-hop culture is now much more a part of the mainstream than it was when Elkund Koza and Hill conducted their studies, there are more writers who are not only familiar with hip-hop culture, but also fans of it themselves. Eminem's media coverage in mainstream media, therefore, ranges from moral criticism and outrage (Rose 2001: W2), to respect for his achievements (Burlingame 2001), to outpourings of admiration for his (rapping) abilities and successes (Strauss 2001), to recognition of his hard stance on social problems (Doherty 2001).

THE 2001 GRAMMY AWARDS

The embrace of Eminem by his musical peers during the 2001 Grammy Awards stirred up so much controversy that everything else that happened during the ceremony seems insignificant. U2 took home three Grammys, as many as Eminem, and still Em dominated all the pre- and post-Grammy coverage, with U2 taking a backseat during what *The Montreal Gazette* referred to as "The Marshall Mathers Grammys" (2001: A1). Admittedly, the hype over the performance of his hit single "Stan" with gay pop-artist Elton John garnered much of this attention, but some newspaper coverage downplayed what could have become a debate over the performance, and hailed Eminem for handling himself with class during his acceptance speeches (Sperounes 2001: C1).

Non-hip-hop artists are quick to come to the rapper's defence. Before the 2001 Grammy Awards ceremony, the *Los Angeles Times* polled previous Grammy winners for their opinion on Eminem ("Madonna, Elton" 2001) and the result was resounding and unanimous support for Eminem's work. All of the artists recognized Eminem for his talent at manipulating the English language and defended his right to express his personal perceptions of the problems in society. Said Stevie Wonder:

> Rap to me is a modern blues — a statement of how and where people are at. ... I think art is a reflection of our society, and people don't like to confront the realities in society. We dance forever around the issues ... but until we really confront the truth, we are going to have a Tupac or Eminem or Biggie Smalls to remind us about it. ... For someone to say, this is a disgrace to the Grammys, come on. There was a time when blues was called a disgrace.

It would indeed be rare to find a musical performer who would be as invested in the idea of lyric censorship as say, Lynne Cheney or Tipper Gore. The rush to defend Eminem's right to express his opinions therefore should surprise no one. Artists have long supported each other's free speech rights, support that often becomes more important than agreement with those opinions.

Madonna, who in the past has herself come under scrutiny from many of the same cultural conservatives who now berate Eminem, is also one of Em's biggest supporters, even going as far as to pen a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* ("Madonna Mauls" 2001). No stranger to this kind of negative attention, Madonna's work in the 80s and early 90s was also seen as having a negative influence on her young listeners. However, today she is recognized for having adapted to changes in the popular music industry and has eased her way into the group of well-respected artists who push artistic limits. In her letter, she praises Eminem for his blatant honesty and for provoking discussion on issues that are usually pushed to the political backburner. Eminem's right to speak his mind has also been defended by Chuck D who claims that Eminem's "interviews are very different to his inner views" (Shaw and Anders 2001: 97).

The Source interpreted Eminem's Grammy nominations in a unique way (Frosh 2001: 43-4). While the editor's were pleased with hip-hop's rise into mainstream recognition and delighted that *The MMLP* received the recognition it deserved, their guarded scepticism about the sincerity of these nominations is justified. Many other black rap artists have released landmark recordings, such as Jay-Z's *Hard Knock Life* and

Biggie's *Ready to Die*, but neither have been nominated in the overall album category. Lauryn Hill, who won the best overall album award (1999) for her *Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, was deemed R&B, not hip-hop: "[s]ome of us wonder whether the Academy feels more comfortable nominating a white rapper when Black artists like Snoop, Jay-Z, Pac, Biggie, and OutKast were passed over time and time again for the very same nomination" (ibid. 44). The Grammy Awards recognize musical achievements, and since the majority of musical performers tend to be young themselves (especially of late) the awards show wants to show that they are more "in tune" with the tastes of the music industry's youth listeners (ibid. 43). It could be argued that no other rapper has record sales that match those of Eminem. Conversely, as most have noted, Eminem likely received the nomination for album of the year because the Grammy nominations committee could not ignore *The Marshall Mathers LP* (Case 2001a).

Despite the level of praise from musicians and the hip-hop community, not everyone was thrilled with Eminem's Grammy successes. Lynne Cheney has expressed concern repeatedly over the way in which other musicians have accepted Eminem and has berated the entire music industry for embracing him through recognition for his work, since she finds it "truly astonishing ... that a man whose work is so filled with hate would be so honoured by his peers" ("Lynne" 2000). While most of the Grammy coverage was somewhat tame compared to the responses Eminem usually confronts, the coverage leading up to the Grammys drew upon the familiar debates, with many people criticizing Eminem for the language with which he talks about women and homosexuals.

One article (Brown 2001: B3) debated the line between role-playing and expressing real feelings, with a music video director stating that since the name of the album (*The Marshall Mathers LP*) represents Eminem's real name, the album's content might not reflect the opinions of a persona, but Eminem's true feelings. Another interviewee in the same article emphasized the importance of realness and personal experience in hip-hop, disagreeing with the notion that Eminem takes on an alter ego when performing. When many of these critics allege that Em is, for instant, homophobic, they miss the fact that Eminem puts himself at the centre of most of this content. For example, a recurring gay character on his albums is Ken Kaniff. During a skit on *The Slim Shady LP*, Ken Keniff calls Eminem, threatening Em with "You want me to fucking melt

in you mouth and not in your hand? I'll melt in your ass you little cock boy!" (Eminem laughs in response) and, in another skit from *The Marshall Mathers LP,* the members of Eminem's rival Detroit rap group Insane Clown Posse perform oral sex on Ken, fantasizing that Ken is Eminem. The joke? Eminem is Ken Kaniff. Furthermore, on "Criminal" Eminem even alludes to a sexual relationship with Dr. Dre: "I told you Dre, you should've kept that thang put away/I guess that'll teach you not to let me play with it, eh?"

It should be noted, however, that most of the more "positive" articles on Em and the Grammys appeared in the entertainment or music sections of their respective papers, or in alternative magazine sources, and were normally written by pop/music critics. The majority of non-music coverage, however, fell into the stereotypical ways of interpreting Eminem. According to Jack F.K. Bungart, the managing editor of the *Times-Herald Online* (2001) if you "[l]isten to Eminem freely throw about hateful, ugly words — in a song about his mother ... suddenly freedom of speech takes a backseat to the hair standing on the back of your neck and the sick feeling in the pit of your stomach." Despite receiving some respect, since *The MMLP* contained such high levels of anger and violence, it has sparked numerous calls for censorship and re-fuelled the on-going debates on artist responsibility. While the censorship issue had been on the backburner, through Eminem the debate has been given new life. Eminem, and rap music overall, are once again the targets of familiar foes: political representatives, "Washington wives,"[13] teachers, and religious groups.

SUMMITS, HEARINGS, AND THE FCC TARGET EMINEM

Much of this kind of coverage centres on comments generated from Hip-Hop Summits, Congressional Hearings, and backlashes from political and specialty groups. At the 2001 Congressional hearing that examined the marketing practices of the entertainment industry and the responsibility of the artist many representatives, for instance Senators Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.), used Eminem's lyrics as an example for supporting censorship of music. Unlike the open attacks Lynne Cheney and others wage on Eminem through the media, at these Congressional Hearings, legislators were careful to ensure that they did not appear as

wanting to restrain the First Amendment rights of musicians. Instead, as with Bill Clinton's quote from earlier, they call upon the music industry to bring this censorship from within, and for artists to take on more of the responsibility for keeping explicit content albums out of the reach of impressionable children.

Hip-hop and its music, therefore, are often attacked by mainstream American for "the language and explicit sexual descriptions of the messages" (White and Cones III 1999: 101) instead of being examined for the conditions and experiences that have allowed such lyrics to emerge. There are some people who believe that all hip-hop lyrics — not just Eminem's — reflect the hopelessness felt by many young people in America (D'Entremont 2001). D'Entremont further evaluates how Eminem, in "subverting the myth of American classlessness ... exposes the delusions of a society that resolutely denies its own failings and inequities." The author of this article goes a step further, finding a legitimate voice in the violent Slim Shady character who "tells hard truths about a violent culture."

Another issue to emerge from these hearings is the tendency of representatives to ignore previous attempts to vilify other entertainers. For instance, at a House Subcommittee meeting to examine the exposure of violent material on children, Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb) said: "Madonna seems tame and lame compared to Eminem" ("Congress" 2001). Could Mr. Terry be forgetting that at one time, Madonna herself was the whipping board for the same agenda that is now using Eminem as a scapegoat and that upon later reflection, her work is now respected as making serious and credible contributions to (popular) music today?

Hammer (2000) states that political leaders should examine Eminem's uses of persona, as well as, irony, and satire more closely:

> Like many of the "new school" hip-hoppers, Slim Shady paints lyrical pictures of a world in which priorities are confused, money corrupts, parenting is a lost art and nobody is accountable for his own actions anymore — especially if he can find a convenient scapegoat. ... Eminem may be strident, but he's simply saying that the modern world is messed up and needs mending from the family level on up. Exactly what the senators are saying.

Several things are apparent from this citation. The first is the effective way in which Hammer employs the use of Eminem's personas (Slim Shady and Eminem). In linking Shady to corruption and unaccountability, Hammer could be seen as suggesting that these

traits are related to the fictional Slim, and not necessarily to the person behind the lyrics. Second, when he discusses Eminem directly, he refers to his brash rapping style, saying instead, "Eminem may be strident" thus comparing Eminem to a messenger of sorts. Finally, since "Slim Shady paints a lyrical picture" of his (Marshall Mathers') life experiences, Hammer could be suggesting that Eminem's critics consider the elements in Eminem's life that allow him to see the world in a "negative" manner.

It does seem odd for Hammer to suggest that Lynne Cheney and her colleagues may have found an ally in Eminem, but Brian Doherty (2000) also argues this point. Like Hammer, Doherty further suggests that Eminem "goes farther than any of his critics in portraying himself as possibly responsible for real-world carnage."[14] While I applaud these journalists for divulging unconventional opinions of Eminem's work and for viewing the elements of hip-hop culture as art forms, both the Hammer and Doherty pieces appeared in alternative news sources, so the likelihood of their reaching critics of hip-hop or even "the people" seems low.

Thus, opinions like these remain an anomaly. For instance, an oft-cited Em song is "Kill You," where he raps about killing women, especially his mother. While "Bitch, Ima Kill you!" (which Eminem repeats throughout the chorus) can be interpreted as misogynist, Em ends the song with "I'm just playin' ladies, you know I love you." This alters the tone of the song, which should be taken into consideration when evaluating Eminem's lyrics, as Kelley (1994: 190) indicated in relation to Ice-T's "I'm Your Pusher" and "Grand Larceny." It is equally important to note which persona Eminem is using to express such thoughts. Slim Shady, the persona Eminem mentions frequently in "Kill You," exists in a fantasy world where a young Marshall Mathers, and not his childhood bullies, is a powerful and violent person on the playground.

There is even further reluctance on the part of Eminem's critics to examine his albums as a whole. This is an important factor because each song unfolds to tell a larger story, which, in the case of *The MMLP*, explains Eminem's reaction to fame, or in *The Slim Shady LP* (1999), describes the struggles of a white member of the underclass vying to make it in hip-hop. Furthermore, in failing to recognize and acknowledge Eminem's use of parody, satire, and play, mainstream Americans are able to maintain a firm grip on their longstanding negative stereotypes of black cultural forms. Thus, in attacking

Eminem and hip-hop, reporters do not have to concede to hip-hop as an art form that deserves as much respect as the blues and jazz. Many times Eminem is shown respect because of the volume of his record sales and not because of his contributions to the music industry. That is not to say that all mainstream, non-music coverage does not recognize Em's talents. One such article, is a commentary by David Staples (2001: E10) that explains why Eminem's rapping skills place him above all of other rappers, and delves into Eminem's satire, humour, and his rhythmic style. For much of the article, Staples consulted with Adam Krims, an expert on hip-hop culture and rap music and author of *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000). Thus, instead of the usual banter that derides Eminem for his lyrical choices, Staples offered advice on how to interpret, understand, and listen to rap music.

Another article examines Eminem's potential appeal for adult fans, and likens Eminem's intricate rhymes to the poetics of Gerald Manley Hopkins (Delingpole 2001: B3). Furthermore, Giles Foden (2001) goes in depth slightly to explain the historical uses of "I" in poetry and compares Eminem's mastery of this to the "great dramatic monologues" of Browning, Frost, Pound, and Eliot, quite a compliment indeed. Foden even cites the *Handbook of Literature*, which states that a monologue should reveal:

> ... a 'soul in action' through the dramatic speech of one character in a dramatic situation. The character is speaking to an identifiable but silent listener at a dramatic moment in the speaker's life. The circumstances surrounding the conversation, one side of which we 'hear' ... are made clear by implication, and an insight into the character of the speaker may result.

SEEING PAST THE HYPE: HIP-HOP/MUSIC MAGAZINES

His connection to Dr. Dre and other hip-hop notables aside, Em is appreciated because of these rap skills of which Foden speaks, the meter and tempo at which he delivers his lyrically-packed rhymes, and because of how he has maintained a strong divide between his mainstream and hip-hop identities. Eminem has received many accolades from hip-hop culture's chief magazine *The Source* and was one of the artists named on "Fat Tape 2000" — recognizing hip-hop's best songs of the year — for "The Way I Am" ("2000" January 2001). The magazine has been one of Eminem's biggest supporters ever since he made it into their "Unsigned Hype" column, a space the

magazine designates for underground emcees who are making waves in their local hip-hop scenes, in 1998: "Point blank, this ain't your average cat. This Motor City kid is a one-of-a-kind talent and he's about to blow past competition, leaving many melted microphones in the dust" ("Unsigned" 2001: 158). Em is also the only white rapper to receive a Source Hip-Hop Award (Lyricist of the Year and Music Video of the Year "Guilty Conscience" in 2000 and in 2001, Music Video of the Year "Stan") and remains the only white rapper to grace the magazine's cover (July 2000 and May 2002).

The Source's editor-in-chief, Carlito Rodriguez said that putting Eminem on the magazine's cover the first time was not a difficult decision because "everyone here respects Eminem as a lyricist" (Brown 2000: 78). On Eminem's second appearance, the *Source* editors said: "Remember a time when rap had no significant white face to speak of? ... Shit has changed y'all. Remember the first time we put a white rapper on the cover of this magazine? We recognized his skill and disregarded the color of his skin" (May 2002: 24). Even more important is, unlike most of those who cover Eminem, the *Source*'s editors, writers, and other well-respected members of the hip-hop community restrain the use of "white" to describe Eminem. His race is a matter of fact, a non-issue because he delivers, lyrically. Instead, Eminem is singled out because:

> [h]e packs more into a single verse than most do in an entire album. With an unparalleled wit, he can tell you to go to hell and draw you a map without missing a beat. Combining haymaker punch lines with storytelling ability made *The Marshall Mathers LP* a must-buy. ("Cover" 2001: 63)

In the *Source*'s review of hip-hop in 2000 ("2000" 2001: 83-118), Eminem was chosen as one of the top 10 artists of the year, second to Jay-Z because of how he has "changed the [rap] game." Even in the face of his mainstream success, Eminem's connection to the hip-hop community has not dissipated. His authenticity as a "real" hip-hop head who has faced a hard-knocked life has been maintained: "[t]he MC['s] ... twisted tales [have] garnered him both criticism and praise. ... In addition, Em has done the unthinkable[:] simultaneously maintained his street and pop credibility. Despite his overwhelmingly pop audience, he is still respected by his rhyme-spittin' peers" (ibid. 90). Eminem has handled the critical transitions from struggling underground artist to a deal with a major record label to a pop superstar with multi-platinum status successfully, further gaining the respect of other rappers since he has not succumbed to the pressures of

his mainstream success: "Em [has taken] the high road — letting his lyrics and skills speak for themselves" (ibid. 90). According to *Spin*, Eminem remains distinctly hip-hop because he maintains a commitment to rapping, instead of extending himself to other areas, which would distract from his music. Even Eminem's film debut *8 Mile,* which will be in theatres on November 8th 2002, remains true to his underground roots, as he will play a character whose life is based loosely on his own experiences as an up-and-coming emcee in Detroit:

> People might well question an obsession that continues long after you'd think he made his point. It's almost as if, through all the railing pundits, *Total Request Live* fests, and screaming suburban amphitheatres, Eminem kept one foot back in those battles at the Hip-Hop Shop, which definitely sound hard to forget. (Norris 2001: 82) [15]

As with generations past, Eminem's youth appeal has aroused the fury of a large number of politicians, reporters, and neo-conservative and neo-liberal groups who fear that his fans are at risk because of the values Eminem promotes through his albums. Eminem has thus become one of the present day's leading sources of malcontent. Rather than respond to such criticism openly, he uses his music to further irritate his critics. In "Renagade," from Jay-Z's *The Blueprint*, he refers specifically to the way in which these conflicting interpretations both describe him as an oppositional force and hold him responsible for the problems in society:

> See I'm a poet to some, a regular modern day Shakespeare
> Jesus Christ the King of these Latter Day Saints here
> To shatter the picture in which of that as they paint me
> As a monger of hate and Satan a scatter-brained atheist
> But that ain't the case; see it's a matter of taste
> We as a people decide if Shady's as bad as they say he is
> Or is he the latter — a gateway to escape?
> Media scapegoat, who they can be mad at today
> See it's easy as cake, simple as whistlin Dixie
> While I'm wavin the pistol at sixty Christians against me
> Go to war with the Mormons; take a bath with the Catholics
> In holy water — no wonder they try to hold me under longer
> I'm a motherfuckin spiteful, DELIGHTFUL eyeful
> The new Ice Cube — motherfuckers HATE to like you
> What did I do? (huh?) I'm just a kid from the gutter
> Makin' this butter off these bloodsuckers, cause I'ma mu'hfuckin
> RENAGADE

Despite this overwhelming popularity, Eminem maintains a rebellious and defiant stance

that is grounded in hip-hop's sense of street credibility. This makes him appealing to younger, teenaged fans and hip-hop's traditionalists; however, it also spurs critics who make him out to be a menace whose rap anthems pose a threat to today's youth.

This very contradiction drives his popularity and the successes of his albums. Eminem takes every misinterpretation of his work, every comment about his supposed influence over youth, and every overblown statement of his character and has created a successful rap persona that launches violent attacks on a society that was built on racial oppression. And, while we may have more insight into black culture now than we did during the early 1940s, the fact that most black rappers do not confront the same criticism as does Eminem, raises a disturbing possibility: that black males are still seen in terms of lower behavioural standards; and, second, that black cultural forms, regardless of their artistic merits, will always be seen as detrimental to the innocent vulnerability of white youth.

Notes

[1] From William Shaw and Marcel Anders "Get in the ring muthaf*#$er" (*Q* September 2001: 94).

[2] This is a term borrowed from John Fiske (*Television Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1987) used by Julia Elkund Koza in "Rap Music: The Cultural Politics of Official Representation," *Sound Identities: Popular Music and the Cultural Politics of Education*, McCarty et al, Eds. (New York, Peter Lang, 1999) to explain media criticism of hip-hop culture.

[3] Hill examined hip-hop in the *Times* between 1985-1990 and Elkund Koza looked at magazines such as *Time, Newsweek,* and *The New Republic*, from 1983-1992.

[4] See David Samuels, "The rap on rap" in *Newsweek* (November 11, 1991: 25)

[5] In 2001, the Federal Trade Commission sent a list of twenty-nine albums containing explicit content to a US Senate committee. Twenty-two of these were albums by rap artists.

[6] Michael Franti was once a part of the duo Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy and has been influenced by Public Enemy throughout his hip-hop career. In 1994, he formed the group Spearhead, a funk-hip-hop group that brings a "consciousness" to their music.

[7] Here, Elkund Koza cites David Gates, "Decoding rap music," in *Newsweek* (March 19, 1990: 60).

[8] See the "Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness of the Committee on Energy and Commerce," *House of Representatives*, 11 February 1994.

[9] For a full description of such debates, see Ken Auletta, Ed. *The Underclass*. Updated and Revised Ed. (Woodstock and New York, The Overlook Press: 1999).

[10] In 1993, US President Bill Clinton was forced to apologize for criticizing rapper Sistah Soulijah because of her ties to hip-hop's message rapping.

[11] Eminem parodies this episode during his music video for "Without Me," the first single from his 2002 release, *The Eminem Show*.

[12] I ran several searches on the Internet conducted on 11 November 2001 looking at <http://www.google.com>, <http://www.yahoo.com>, and <http://clubs.yahoo.com>. The respective results are as follows. Web sites on *Google*: Eminem – 596,000; Britney Spears – 580,000; *NSYNC – 389,000; Backstreet Boys – 368,000; Christina Aguilera – 231,000; Nick Carter – 40,800; and, Justin Timberlake – 39,600. On *Yahoo!*: Eminem – 280,000; Britney Spears – 273,000; Nick Carter – 192,000; Justin Timberlake – 187,000; *NSYNC – 182,000; Backstreet Boys – 173,000; and Christina Aguilera – 109,000. *Yahoo!Clubs*: *NSYNC – 4584; BSB – 2325; Britney Spears – 1956; Justin Timberlake – 1178; Eminem – 835; Nick Carter – 774; Christina Aguilera – 649.

[13] This was the nickname given to the group of women, (wives of Representatives and Congressmen) who rallied to form, among other things, the Parents Music Resource Centre, through which they lobbied for lyrical responsibility. Their efforts resulted in the "Parental Advisory: Explicit Content" label that now appears on three out of every five rap albums and one in five rock albums.

[14] "Role Model," "Stan," "Guilty Conscience" are such examples.

[15] MTV held a weekend, hosted by Eminem called EmTV. The Hip-Hop Shop is a now defunct Detroit club where Eminem used to freestyle battle with other Detroit-area MCs.

CHAPTER 3: FROM *INFINITE* TO *THE MARSHALL MATHERS LP*: EMINEM'S SEARCH FOR HIS OWN HIP-HOP VOICE

Eminem's Slim Shady person is today well known for the way in which it allows Eminem to convey a gang-banging, violent attitude reminiscent of a street thug through a semi-fictional white body. While that is much too simple a description of Eminem's use of Shady, the traits of this alter ego allow Eminem to maintain a clear divide between his hip-hop image and pop-star status. Through Shady, Eminem can maintain his success in each of these areas because Shady appeals to the pop-fans who feed off Shady's rebellious attitude, and to the hip-hop fans that appreciate the honest and poignant depictions of American society. While Shady has brought Eminem much hip-hop and non-hip-hop acclaim, this alter ego did not appear in Eminem's rhymes until after the hip-hop community responded unfavourably to his first solo underground album *Infinite* (1996). As Eminem reveals in his current work, at the start his Shady persona was a culmination of the negative reactions he experienced as an underground emcee, but it eventually became a way of channelling the anger he felt in other areas of his life. As an "anger conduit" of sorts, Slim Shady became Eminem's way of expanding his rapping repertoire to include thug narratives in his rhymes and as such, added another dimension to his emcee skills.

In this chapter, I examine the way in which Eminem's rap style has evolved and changed over the course of his four albums. Specifically, I am interested in how Eminem went from one rap extreme to the other: from the "softer" style in his solo debut album *Infinite* (1996) to the complete opposite on his subsequent 1997 release, *The Slim Shady EP*. Furthermore, Eminem's major-label albums, *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) and *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000) have also changed in style and content in relation to each other. I believe that many of these changes are Eminem's reactions to the media or peer responses following the releases of each album. The changes to Eminem's rap style, which can be seen as a response to the emphasis placed on "keepin it real" in rap music, indicate first, the importance of maintaining a thug narrative within an individual voice, and second, the significance placed on re-invention in the hip-hop community. To frame Eminem's work within a hip-hop/street-themed context, I examine rap's pre-gangsta roots briefly, leading into a discussion of gangsta rap's gang-banging roots and how these

established the traditions of rap as relaying a studio-based ghetto "reality," especially notable in the rhymes of NWA, Tupac Shakur, Ice Cube, and Biggie Smalls. Gang-banging refers to any activity associated with street culture's thug life: violence, self-indulgence, nihilism, celebration of guns and drugs, suspicion of women, and hatred/disrespect of authority. I explain how the differences between *Infinite* (1996), *The Slim Shady EP* and *LP* (1997 and 1999 respectively), and *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000) can be seen as taking the work of these rappers to the next level. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, that the narrative content of his albums is based heavily upon the responses and reactions to previous albums is an important element in Eminem's work. Apparently, the rapper who claims that he "Just Don't Give a Fuck" *does* care about what others have to say about his work.

HIP-HOP FROM LIVE PERFORMANCE TO STUDIO STARDOM

With the widespread popularity of gangsta rap, most members of the mainstream view all rappers as gangsta rappers, regardless of whether the content of their rhymes justifies this. Previously, other styles included the "party rapping" of old schoolers like Grandmaster Flash, the "message rapping" of Public Enemy and Sistah Souljah, and the "playa" style of "mack rappers" such as Big Daddy Kane and Sir Mix-A-Lot.[1] While party rappers were known for call-response routines and rapping over existing records, this early rap genre (during the 1970s) is best known for live freestyle battles held during house and block parties where "reputations were built on the charred remains of "sucker MCs" who were reduced to dust with scathing disses" (Fernando jr. 1994: 256). Despite this aspect, subjects remained positive, with dance-orientated, party-themed beats (Krims 2000: 55-58) that would help rappers "move the crowd" and set the mood for a block party: "[b]ack in the day, says [rapper] Lord Finesse, you wasn't thinking about no props or no dancers. It was all about coming into a party and ripping shit up with your lyrics" (Fernando jr. 1994: 256).

From 1979 to 1984, sales of hip-hop and rap albums increased dramatically, and, as production factors increased, hip-hop as a whole became more commercialized. The most successful act of this time was rap group Run-DMC. Run-DMC were the first rappers to cross-over to the pop market successfully, a move that was marked by their

collaboration with rockers Aerosmith on "Walk this Way," which rose to number four on Billboard's pop single charts (1986). They also earned rap's first gold (*Run-DMC*), platinum (*King of Rock*), and multi-platinum (*Raising Hell*) awards for album sales from 1984-86 (100K, one million, and one million+) respectively (Dimitriadis 1999: 363).

Around this time, a new rap subgenre, "message rap," began to emerge. As message rappers began to use their rhymes to promote positive images of blacks, rap messages thus became more "political" in feel and content. Despite these changes to rap narrative, the dance-orientated beats still played a significant part of message rap's background beats. Feeling the need to describe the black existence more truthfully, rappers, such as Public Enemy and KRS-One, started making their rhymes more reflective of the experiences of young blacks in the ghettos. As a result, songs that emerged during this time relied heavily upon creating the sense of an urban Black community, for instance, Public Enemy's "Don't Believe the Hype" and "Fight the Power." Such songs urged young blacks to stand up against the systematic institutional discrimination they faced because of their skin colour.

A VIEW OF "THUG LIFE" FROM STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON

This new stance by message rappers created much tension within the black community, as many youth started expressing their anger over the ways they were being treated. Rather than offering positive ways for overcoming this mistreatment, rap started to move toward overt expressions of anger and violent resistance through gangsta rap. Many theorists (George 1998; Krims 2000; Ro 1996; and Dimitriadis 2001) have examined the many genres and subgenres of rap to develop out of hip-hop music, and express their own concerns for the ways in which all kinds of rap are today viewed and criticized under criteria that were once reserved for gangsta rap.

Niggaz With Attitude (NWA) was comprised of five rappers (MC Ren, Yella, Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and Eazy-E) from Compton, who popularized gang-banging values through their lyrics. Their debut album *Straight Outta Compton* (1988) "introduced" the world to the toughness and attitude required of young black males and showed contempt for everything from police brutality, to the disloyalty of their peers, to the unfriendliness of the streets. Just as party rappers coined the phrase "you don't stop" to push their

audiences into a dance-frenzy, NWA popularized their own catch-phrase — "by whatever means necessary" — that would become the anthem for their legions of fans. At a time when message rappers were moving hip-hop toward nationalism and black pride, NWA came in and moved rap into a new direction: "NWA's nihilism was set to more appealing music. The "positive" acts were viewed as anachronisms by a hyperprogressive audience and discarded while the one-dimensional gangstas signed six-figure album deals and dragged hip-hop away from its roots" (Ro 1996: 6-7). This would change the rap game forever, making it into a "man's" game, focused on glorified stories of sexual conquests, guns, violence, murder, and mayhem:

> The gangster narrative became an intrinsic part of the art at this time, engendering an entire genre. Its wild financial success has helped to shape the contours of rap's present landscape, the "language" through which rappers articulate their raps. Most artists today acknowledge the genre either implicitly or explicitly, as values such as "hardness" and "realness" now dominate across the board. (Dimitriadis 2001: 30)

NWA's "Fuck tha Police" was an instant hit, striking a chord with fans in the ghettos and in the suburbs alike. However, the song also incited negative reactions from police officers all over the United States. In fact, NWA was prohibited from performing this song in Detroit, and when they failed to comply, the group was arrested. As this song has some historical significance where perceptions of gangsta rap are concerned, it can be viewed as an example of the "first wave" of gangsta rap:

> Cause the police always got somethin' stupid to say
> They put out my picture with silence
> Cause my identity by itself causes violence
> The E^2 with the criminal behavior
> Yeah, I'm a gangsta, but still I got flavor
> Without a gun and a badge, what do ya got?
> A sucker in a uniform waitin' to get shot
> By me, or another nigga
> And with a gat it don't matter if he's smaller or bigger

Many of NWA's songs contained subject matter about growing up in the projects, police racism, and the use of guns (both on them and, by them on others), which titillated the listeners' voyeuristic desires to experience life in the ghetto. This ghetto reality, portrayed not only by NWA but by most other rappers since then, exploits the experiences of the few inner-city youth who turn to violent means as a response to this discrimination, and,

at the same time, the opinions of some people in the white-dominated society who see all black youth, regardless of class or privilege, as menaces to society.

NWA's immense popularity outside of hip-hop's common circles also changed rap into what George (1998: 47) describes as a "simplistic mass media stereotype." Thus, rap was no longer perceived through the diverse styles of its artists, but rather through the politics of ghettocentricity (McLaren 1999: 48). According to Ronin Ro (1996: 6) NWA felt this new rapping style would "guarantee a built-in audience with thousands of gang-members infiltrating LA." However, the hard beats, bold rhythms, and catchy rhymes also caught the attention of white teens, especially those affluent teens in the suburbs. By giving suburbanites a glimpse of "thug life," rap had found its way out of the ghettos, grabbing the attention of these kids who longed to understand the have-not lifestyle and adopt the rebellious attitude depicted on the albums.

OGs REFLECT ON THEIR MOTIVATONS AND DESIRES

Dimitriadis, in his brilliant examination of hip-hop culture through the years, *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip-Hop as Text, Pedagogy and Lived Practice* (2001) and George in *Hip-Hop America* (1998) point to the complexity and insightfulness in the rhymes of 2Pac and Biggie as two of the first "gangsta" rappers to embark upon styles that strayed from gang-banging narratives. George, moreover, implies that despite evidence that proves contrary to such identification, Biggie and 2Pac became gangsta rappers after their deaths, which are now seen as the results of their "violent" recordings (1998: 48). In an argument that is echoed by many other theorists, he also reasons that expressions of violence in rhymes do not indicate that a rapper is a gangsta rapper, nor do themes related to street life suggest gangsta rap. In sum, he (ibid. 46-49) argues that much of the work in hip-hop today is quite diverse and much too complex to be categorized as gangsta rap:

> My point is that most MCs who've been categorized as gangsta rappers are judged thoughtlessly without any understanding of the genuine differences between them. Besides, what's gangsta rap anyway? Listen to any of NWA's albums, as well as Eazy-E's solo efforts, Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* and Snoop Doggy Dogg's *Doggystyle*. ... But outside of this collection of records — most of them brilliantly modulated vocals supervised by Dr. Dre — I'd be hard-pressed to agree to label any other major star a gangsta rapper. (Ibid. 47)

While the specific themes of violence, drug use, and life on the streets (told from the male perspective) have a connection to rap narratives, rappers eventually started to move away from this singular view of black life in the ghettos. OGs (original gangstas) became more interested in creating narratives, deploying emotions, and revealing their more personal sides. In adding such elements, however, rappers had to ensure that their new style did not appear to shift too far away from "thug life" as this had become a way of conveying hip-hop's all-important "realness." Rappers confront the influence of thug themes today and face the arduous job of applying a similar theme through different styles, a task that Dimitriadis (2001: 94) identifies as the difficulty of striving for individualism within a self-contained vocal text.

Following NWA's successes, many rappers began to steer attention toward the restraints of American institutions and the racist attitudes of American citizens, extending the work of message rappers within a gangsta context. After leaving NWA, Ice Cube adopted what can be seen as a more "militant" style of rap since he examined how black Americans are viewed and treated by other Americans. His second solo album *Death Certificate* (1991) looks at the historical (mis)treatment of African-Americans and targets the views, feelings, and attitudes toward blacks. In "I Wanna Kill Sam" for instance, Cube covers a range of subjects concerning blacks, including slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, censorship attempts, and the rising HIV crisis.

The first major shift from gangsta rapping, however, is found in the work that developed around the mid-90s with help from rappers like Pac and Biggie, who moved rap from narratives surrounding the gangsta figure into complex portraits of "psychologized heroes" (Dimitriadis 2001: 94-101). While the underlying themes of gangsta rap remained intact, rap moved from glimpses of the gangsta's life to looking at the motivations, desires, and personal conflicts that turned the individual into a "G" (gangsta). 2Pac's *Me Against the World* (1995) is an example of this. The gang-banging "thug life" narrative remained a central aspect of the album's narrative, however, songs also included "Dear Mama," a lamentation over the struggles of young black single mothers. Here, he examines how his childhood (lack of a father, drug-dependant mother) turned him to a life of crime. Thus, rather than simply rapping about his criminal lifestyle, Pac looks at the social restrictions and conditions that turned him (and turns other black

males) to a criminal lifestyle. In the media, 2Pac's complexity was a well-known, popular aspect of his narrative:

> Many interviews and news stories on Tupac stressed his complex and divided soul, pointing how his internal struggles between "good" (fighting for black rights while dealing with his inner life) and "evil" (his uncritical gangsta posturing) were central to his music, which, again, ran the gamut from the more "positive" to the wildly "negative." (Dimitriadis 2001: 101)

This "biography rap" of 2Pac and also Biggie Smalls marked an important shift in the gangsta rap narrative, paving the way for newer rappers to come in and try different styles: "Tupac goes beyond a two-dimensional sketch of his life to present a complex, deep-structured, and highly textured portrait of it. In weaving together the narrative of his mother and her struggles, he simultaneously constructs an "'account' that functions to justify or explain the choice he made" (ibid. 98). Dimitriadis (ibid. 29) further explains the influence of the gangsta narrative:

> Part of the gangsta's wide cultural currency comes from the universally extractable nature of his narrative. His violent outlaw, living his life outside of dominant cultural constraints, solving his problems through brute power and domination, is a character type with roots deep in popular American lore. He embodies such capitalist values as rugged individualism, rampant materialism, strength through physical force, and male domination, while he rejects the very structures defining that culture.

SLIM SHADY EMERGES THROUGH EMINEM'S CHANGING STYLES

While the out-of-control gangsta traits now play an important part in the construction of Eminem's public personas, this was not the case with Eminem's earlier work on *Infinite* (1996). Well aware that his emcee skills set him apart from other rappers, Eminem relied on his speedy delivery through more positive subjects rather than a gangsta narrative. However, as this proved unsuccessful, on his second underground album, *The Slim Shady EP* (1997) Eminem developed Slim Shady, a persona, a gangsta alter ego, that could capture the violent nature of the streets and channel his anger. The narrative of this persona, combined with sharp-witted rhymes, made Eminem an underground star in Detroit, caught the attention of famed rapper and producer Dr. Dre, and led to major-label debut *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) on Aftermath/Interscope Records. This was an instant hit in the suburbs and in the ghettos, selling four million copies in the

United States. Eminem followed up this success with *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000). This disc was even more successful than his previous album, selling 1.76 million copies in the first week to become the fastest-selling hip-hop album of all-time. It was also the best selling album by any solo artist that year (second overall behind *NSYNC's *Celebrity*). Since then, Em has made numerous guest appearances on other rap albums and has produced many of these tracks himself. These include: Xzibit's "Don't Approach Me" on *Restless* (2000) and "Renagade" from Jay-Z's *The Blueprint* (2001). Eminem even oversaw the entire production of D-12's (The Dirty Dozen, his Detroit rap crew) debut album, *Devil's Night* (which itself hit platinum status) on his own Shady Records label (through Aftermath Records).

A review of Eminem's major-label work in *Pandemonium Online* (2000) points to the influence of the gangsta narrative on hip-hop culture. This is one of the few reviews that recognize the differences between Eminem's two major-label albums, not just in terms of content, but also in the way the personalities and narratives of his Shady/Marshall Mathers personas are more refined on *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000) than they were on *The Slim Shady LP* (1999). Reyes furthermore refers to Em's pop-star status and argues:

> Upon one listen to his latest work, *The Marshall Mathers LP*, it's clear that the mad poet has more talent, insight, and relevance than all of his *TRL* contemporaries combined.
>
> Unlike most overly hyped artists, Eminem seems to feed on both the pressure and attention. *The Marshall Mathers LP* is superior to its predecessor, *The Slim Shady LP*, in both content and scope. It's a far more cohesive and focused album that drives his vision of a man pushed to the brink of sanity through the persecution of a twisted and cruel society home. Eminem has progressed from the angry Slim Shady figure who pushed limits and raised eyebrows to a full blown enemy of the people who thrives on the animosity and disapproval he's received from society.

In referring to Em's status on MTV's *Total Request Live*, Reyes makes a connection between a "new" Slim Shady and non-hip-hop success. Shady's rebellious attitude is what drives his success and popularity with the *TRL* generation. The more unlikeable he becomes, the more appealing he is to the children who have not experienced his childhood circumstances firsthand. In addition, Reyes indicates that the Shady/Eminem/Marshall Mathers personas are developed from the "persecution of a

twisted and cruel society home," suggesting that these personas are a result of external factors, and not just the internal angst of a misguided young man. Essential to Reyes' argument is the final sentence where she contends that the external responses to Shady are often what drive Shady's anger, disdain, and disregard for societal mores.

1996: INFINITE

Both the quote from Dimitriadis about the influence of gangsta-ism on hip-hop and the excerpt from *Pandemonium Online* on Eminem's use of Shady provide an excellent framework for looking at Eminem's rapping styles before and after he achieved fame. Eminem made one album without his alter ego, but still little is known about his rap style before Shady. This first solo effort *Infinite* (1996) was not as successful as the recent albums that have brought him both hip-hop and non-hip-hop acclaim. On *Infinite,* Eminem moved away from the traditions that had been established by previous rappers and avoided any overt use of street-related themes. Instead, much of the content was based on boasting about the superiority of his rap skills and the challenges he faced as an underground artist. While boasting is an essential part of emceeing, ever since NWA introduced street themes to rap, boasting has been reinforced through thug narratives. At this point in his career, however, Eminem had not created the Shady persona, and as such, *Infinite* has a positive, upbeat tone, especially when compared to Em's major-label albums. In addition, he refrains from making direct references to and about his anger for his parents, his wife, and the many haters he refers to on his albums as Slim. In fact, even references to his whiteness are absent from *Infinite*, as are mentions of barriers this might have placed on his hip-hop career.

That is not to say that the subject of race is taboo on this album. Looking back at the work on this album, knowing his early rap history, and the consensus that had developed about white rappers, we can assume that much of the disrespect Eminem describes is race-related criticism rather than opinions of his emcee skills. At many times, Eminem alludes to other rappers having problems with him rapping; however he does not relate their dislike of him directly to his whiteness. The chorus of "Open Mic," rapped by Thyme, could be seen as raising the issue of who is entitled to rap: "Ayo, who the fuck passed you the mic and said that you can flow?/Point him out bitch, I want to know." In

response, Eminem refers to his battling and freestyle skills:

> Jacking lives of MC's, now I'm set to launch a plan
> For blowing up the stage with illegal contraband
> I stomped your man so unless you want what he got
> You better set the mic down, I'm steaming like a teapot
> I'll make the tea hot, people get in my face and ask
> If I wanna battle, then I chase them in a Jason mask
> It's an amazing task to battle with success
> I never gave a fuck, now I could give a fuck less
> And in a slugfest I get physical like physicians
> Invisible like magicians with mystical mic traditions

This kind of disrespect, or perhaps, more correctly, Em's search and desire for respect, is a continual theme on this album. Like most artists that must seek success in their local scenes before they can enter mainstream markets, Eminem raps about the barriers that other rappers set in his path, which proved detrimental to his career at that time. Incidentally, Eminem does not ever state directly where this disrespect is rooted, and, as with "Open Mic" responds to Thyme in a rather un-Eminem, non-violent manner. If Eminem had been responding through Shady, he would have threatened Thyme with bold-faced intimidations of violence and forthright rhymes boasting his skills. Furthermore, while avoiding specific references to skin colour (possibly because of the baggage that is attached to white rappers), on "Open Mic" Eminem still makes several references that could imply that this disrespect was rooted in racial issues. For instance, he raps that he blows up the stage with an "illegal contraband" (a white person with strong rap skills) and also refers to his "invisibil[ity]" perhaps as acknowledgement of how he was passed over for recognition consistently because his skin colour was seen as evidence that he could not rap.

The connection to his Detroit underground roots on *Infinite* are also portrayed in a different manner from his major-label work since Eminem makes more references to competing in (and often winning) freestyle battles, whereas his work on *The Slim Shady LP* (1999) and *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000) placed more emphasis on the disrespect he received in the underground. These references are dispersed throughout the album, such as on "Infinite" when he raps, "[c]ause there's a monster in me that will always want to kill MCs/Mic messaler, slamming like a wrestler" and on "Tonite" with rhymes about his future success, "Eminem is heading skyward/For those who thought that I would

make you bored/and treat you like a piece of plywood/I've got miracle lyrical capability in me/With the agility to escape a killer bee colony." Even through "313" (Detroit's area code) is about the superior skills of "sweet MCs in the 313," Eminem raps about how his skills bring the fans into the building, while softer rappers cower in the corners. This focus on freestyling is important to *Infinite* because, as with his more current albums, it situates where Eminem was in his career and his personal life. Thus, the focus is on striving to plan for his future and his family through what he hopes will become a (financially) successful rapping career.

While Eminem steered clear of race issues, this was not the only thing that was different about his style on *Infinite*. The beats and rhythms were quite different from the Eminem-Dre productions, using softer, less catchy, and less noticeable backdrops to the songs. Most importantly, he delivers these rhymes in a steady, softer voice that sometimes sounds hopeless. Although he does not use a monotonous tone, his nasalized, sarcastic, and angry voices are missing from the album. This enhances the bragging content of the songs because it allows the listener to focus on how Em says his rhymes, rather than becoming distracted by other elements. Even Eminem's songs about his ex-wife Kim are different. In a complete about-face, "Searchin'" is a soft, tender love song[3] in which he declares his love to a woman (whom we assume is Kim, although there are no actual references to her name), reminding her that his "intentions are good" and that he's "eager to be [her] man legally wed."

Further absent are the sassiness, satire, and the ironic and dark humour;[4] this can be related to his not-yet-developed use of voices, along with the no-holds barred unrepentant attitude of a gangsta. In fact, some of Eminem's work here could be interpreted as criticizing the ideals supported by gangsta rappers. On the track "Infinite" for instance, Eminem raps about staying away from the violent, thug lifestyle that Black rappers usually depict on their albums. Instead of using the familiar street-related situations, Eminem's lyrics examined the difficulties associated with being an unknown hip-hop artist as well as the numerous other struggles he faced while toiling in minimum wage jobs and the music industry. On "It's OK," he discusses his disdain over kids using guns to steal clothing from other kids and his fear about his brother running into drug addicts ("My little brother's trying to learn his mathematics/He's asthmatic, running

home from school away from crack addicts/Kids attract static, children with automatics/Taking target practice on teens for Starter Jackets."). Eminem's personal avoidance of the thug life, like that of Black youth who find their solace on basketball courts or in hip-hop, came through his preference for emceeing over gang-banging: "I never packed a tool or acted cool, it wasn't practical/I'd rather lead a tactful, tractical track for your fancy." Furthermore, Eminem discusses how *quitting* drugs helped his rap career ("I quit smokin' cess to open my chest") and how religion saved him from a life of crime: "But in the midst of this insanity, I found my Christianity/Through God there's a wish he granted me/He showed me how to cope with the stress/And hope for the best, instead of mope and depressed."

Present on this album, although still not developed to its current level, was the wit, embedded within tight metaphors and lyrics about the all-too familiar narrative of a life of poverty, delivered at a tempo and metre that, even then, would have been virtually unparalleled by other emcees. In moving from one line to the next, Eminem rarely makes pauses or takes time to breathe; instead, the lines of each song flow together, in a string-like fashion, creating a rhythmic, masterful use of his effortless, fast-paced rap style. Even at this early stage in his solo career, Eminem's speed, tempo, and the smooth delivery of such complex rhyming patterns and syllables are undeniable. Eminem often shows off these skills (as he does to present day) by rhyming words that would not rhyme together ordinarily, changing syllable emphasis and altering word pronunciation to make the rhyme work better: "culprit" with "skull split," "miraculous" and "Draculas" with "whack you was" and "hatchet" with "scratch it" on "Tonite;" on "313" he rhymes "packed to capacity" with "crack of his ass shitty;" and on "Never 2 Far" he changes rhyming patterns in order to connect seven lines:

> Cause man I live in the D, this shit ain't given for free
> Nothing's different to me, so what, it's easy to see
> I'll be the prisoner to flee, all of this misery
> I'm not wishing to be another fish in the sea
> But just an MC, so listen to me, but if you disagree
> You missing the key, you ain't even in the brisk of the tea
> Unconditionally, my aspects to cash checks

These kinds of rhyming patterns are best displayed on the aforementioned "Infinite," which incidentally is what Em (2000: 135) believes is his tightest work on this

album. (I would have to agree). Here, the form of the song is more central than the content, a throwback to rap's earlier days when the way of storytelling was more important than the story itself. This is more of a "show-your-skill" song but the boasting here is quite different from "Open Mic" or any of the other boast tracks on this album. Instead, the flow, delivery, and use of metaphors cause "Infinite" to stand out from the other songs on the album: "I greet intensive ladies, I spoil all your fans/I foil plans and leave fluids leaking like oil bands/My coil hands around this microphone lethal/One thought in my cerebral is deeper than a Jeep full of people" and "My thesis will smash a stereo to pieces/My acapella releases plastic masterpieces through telekinesis/And eases you mentally, gently, sentimentally, instrumentally/With entity, dementedly meant to be Infinite."

The use of biography is another area in which *Infinite* differs from Eminem's more popular work. Since most of the album is reserved for boasting about his skills, details about his personal life are not needed to support this content. As I mentioned earlier, while this album does inform listeners about Eminem's personal situation, he does not use biography as extensively as he does now. Listeners do not know details about his relationship with the woman to whom he is professing his love, nor are they aware of the name of the daughter he mentions. His references to his underclass roots are also different from his current work, because he raps about how he plans to change this condition (through *legal* means of employment). The personal details are kept to a minimum; listeners are told just enough to see to see that his connection to hip-hop is not based solely on his emcee skills, but on his personal hardships (This is extremely important because of the lingering hard feelings that exist from the experience with Vanilla Ice.). As a result, the stories Eminem tells are not as interesting as those that come in his later work. However, the lack of personal narrative guides listeners indirectly to focus on Eminem' storytelling methods. Unfortunately, while the work on *Infinite* was quite rich and thoughtful, it was not well received and did not help propel Eminem into stardom.

1997 & 1999: THE SLIM SHADY ALBUMS

The tone and feel to Eminem's second solo effort in 1997 are so different from those of *Infinite* that an entirely different artist could have released it. Indeed, this is

almost the case, as an irate, revenge-seeking thug on *The Slim Shady EP* has replaced the young man with a positive outlook from *Infinite*. Since *Infinite* had been dismissed as a Vanilla Ice sequel and Eminem had been criticized for what was seen as imitating the style of Nas or AZ, Eminem's rap abilities, in turn, were also undermined. Eminem's perception of a colour-based criticism helped to fuel his anger, the creation of his second independent album, and the construction of his alter ego, Slim Shady. Eminem explains how he made the transition from the positive rapper on his first album to the nihilistic Slim Shady persona on his second:

> My first album is a combination of everything I went through during my first couple of years as a frustrated emcee. I wanted the public to have the perception of me as a carefree kid who has a lot of problems but tries not to think of them. I wanted people to feel my pain, but to say to them that it's aight. I don't sweat it. Sort of saying that my life was fucked up, but it really didn't bother me. Thing was, the more I started writing and the more I slipped into this Slim Shady character, the more it just started becoming me. My true feelings were coming out, and I just needed an outlet to dump them in. I needed some kind of persona. I needed an excuse to let go of all this rage, this dark humor, the pain, and the happiness. (2000: 3)

The Slim Shady EP (1997) and Slim Shady persona are heralded as the elements that gave Eminem his big break. While Shady does call attention to the important issues of perceptions of class and poverty where race are concerned, I feel the creation of this alter ego is, more importantly, a strategic move to improve Eminem's position in the hip-hop community. In integrating hip-hop cool into the performance of a rap alter ego, a change that can also be linked to his increased use of biography, Eminem applies the example of young black males attempting to survive on the streets to his own "survival" within the hip-hop community. His uses of personal and fictional biography also become more prominent, as listeners are now aware of his legal name ("If I Had"), his daughter's name ("Just the Two of Us" which becomes "'97 Bonnie and Clyde" on 1999's *The Slim Shady LP*), and begin to realize that the rapper is white. The album thus takes on a tone which is angrier and sadder than that of *Infinite*, as Eminem links his struggles as a rapper to his inability to provide for his family. On *The SSEP*, Eminem also begins to employ current events (by cele-baiting), calls attention to America's social disintegration, and establishes Shady's "Just Don't Give a Fuck" attitude through a hit single of the same name. In following the path of gangsta rappers before him, he directs Shady's anger and

violence toward women (especially his wife, whose body is dumped in the Detroit River on "Just the Two of Us"). Once again, these changes are associated with his struggles in hip-hop. Shady is angry with his wife, who does not respect him because of his financial troubles, which exist because of the way that society views the underclass. Eminem uses all of these elements to justify his, or more correctly Slim Shady's, negative attitude.

The first track on *The SSEP*, "Intro (Slim Shady)," is essential to understanding and recognizing how the Slim Shady alter ego is constructed from *Infinite*'s Eminem. It is a skit that begins with music you might find right before the climactic point in a B-horror flick. At start, there is an ominous voice calling out to a terrified Eminem. The track leads directly into the EP's first full length song "Low, Down, Dirty" where Eminem introduces Slim Shady's nihilism and self-hatred: "Warning! This shit's gon be R-rated, restricted/You see this bullet hole in my neck? It's self-inflicted/Doctor slapped my momma, "bitch you got a sick kid." Due to this transition, the second track's subject manner, and our familiarity with Slim Shady, it is safe to assume that the unidentifiable voice on the intro track is Slim Shady.

[Shady]	Eminemmmmm ...
[Eminem]	Nnnnoooo ...
[Shady]	EMINEMMMMM ...
[Eminem]	NNNNOOOOOO ...
[Shady]	HA HAAA. Wake the fuck up motherfucker!
[Eminem]	(screaming) What do you want from me?
[Shady]	HA HA HAA! Remember me?
[Eminem]	I KILLED YOU!
[Shady]	You thought I was dead, didn't you?
[Eminem]	What do you want from me?
[Shady]	I'm aliiiveeeee!
[Eminem]	OHHHH GOD!
[Shady]	Get up!
[Eminem]	NNNOOOO ...
[Shady]	Get up and look in the mirror!
[Eminem]	I don't want to!!!
[Shady]	Look in the mirror (leave me alone!) and see this reflection.
[Shady]	AH HA-HA! Look in mirror! ... You're NOTHING. ... You're NOTHING without me! Look in the motherfuckin' mirror!
[Eminem]	Leave me the fuck alooooonnneeeee! (ends with mirror breaking)

I believe that the voice on this track and thus, Eminem himself convey the belief that white rappers are nothing in the hip-hop world without some kind of street credibility. The Shady we are introduced to on this album is a drug-using, trigger-happy, unstable

alcoholic who hates not only women and authority figures, but practically everyone who has, or ever will, cross his path.

Further differentiating *The SSEP* from *Infinite* are the ways in which Eminem's lyrical abilities are no longer highlighted and emphasized; rather, they are hidden behind the Slim Shady narrative. This allows Em to better convey Slim's thug attitude. In addition, to support the changes and additions to Eminem's rap narrative, there is a remarkable shift in the musical beats and the way in which the lyrics are delivered. Due to the shift to street-related themes and traits, the album has an overall harder edge, which is supported by the beats, musical choices, and the irate tone to Eminem's narrative and rap delivery. Another addition to *The SSEP*, although not used as extensively as on his major-label work, is Em's use of differing tones and voices. Eminem also begins to dabble with elements of parody and play (I look at this closely in the following chapter), which can also be attributed to the emergence of Slim Shady.

Even Eminem's boast tracks are different, as they are entwined in a narrative of mayhem and of the danger Slim Shady is capable of posing. Eminem is well aware of the uniqueness Shady gives him and follows up the statement, "There's no one who's identical to my fresh and authentic flow," that he made on "Tonite" (from *Infinite*) with "And if you hear a man that sounds like me smack him/and ask him where the fuck did he get his damn raps from" on "Low, Down, Dirty." This line is important because Eminem indicates that his style is unique and thus responds to those who accused him of sounding like other rappers by revealing that, in this instance, it is the other rapper, and not him, who "stole" this style.

The Dr. Dre-produced *Slim Shady LP* (1999) was Eminem's first album after signing with Aftermath Records. As with 1997's *The SSEP*, Shady plays a significant narrative role. Eminem takes this persona through a variety of subjects, such as "encouraging" the use of date rape drugs in "Guilty Conscience" and reminding his listeners about the effects of teen bullying on victims in "Brain Damage" where he describes a fantasy-revenge sequence on one of his own bullies. Furthermore, Eminem also makes numerous references to his death (or, perhaps the death of the Eminem from *Infinite*) and resurrection as Slim Shady. As I indicated above, the emergence of Slim Shady marks an incredible shift in Eminem's work and in rap music in terms of

biography. While 2Pac and Biggie were praised for their use of personal biography, Eminem creates a biography around a fictional alter ego, one that allows him to perform the identity of a thug without being perceived as appropriating the use of black or hip-hop cool in an erroneous manner. Eminem keeps this biography going throughout most of his major-label work by referring back to lines and other personas that he mentions on previous songs. Regular listeners of Eminem's work should be able to identify these characters and experiences from Shady's past, in this way, Eminem establishes a personal background for Shady.

The tone of this album contains some harder-edged tunes (even harder than on the EP, but this can be traced to stellar production from Dr. Dre) and some much more sombre moments, with Eminem reflecting on his personal struggles with poverty ("Rock Bottom"). All of these bring his listeners "closer" to sharing the experiences of young men, regardless of skin colour, who deal with the struggles of poverty on a regular basis. In this song, Eminem reflects on the personal biography of Marshall Mathers, describing his struggles as a toiling rap artist with a young family. This is relayed through a touching sense of distraught emotion and passion that Eminem had not used as effectively on his earlier albums. For instance, Eminem describes the constant struggles of people who live in poverty, in a manner which recalls the stories that black rappers have used to describe their own lives before their rap careers took off: "My life is full of empty promises/And broken dreams/Hopin' things look up/But there ain't no job openings/I feel discouraged, hungry, and malnourished/Living in this house with no furnace, unfurnished" ("Rock Bottom").

As the changes from *Infinite* (1996) to *The SSEP* (1997) can be seen as a response to criticism of the former, several of the additions to *The SSLP* (1999) can also be seen in this manner. The first track from the EP is replaced with a "Public Service Announcement," which jokingly warns that this album is not for children. This is followed by the catchy hit single "My Name Is," both of which are even more effective at relaying Shady's attitude than the EP's Intro/"Low, Down, Dirty" combination. There are also numerous references to Eminem's perceived ill-effect on children in "Role Model," "Still Don't Give A Fuck," and "I'm Shady." Eminem's skill boasting also undergoes a slight change. In reference to his rapping speed he raps (quite angrily) that "I'm ducked

the fuck down while I'm writin this rhyme/cause I'm probably gonna get struck with lightnin' this time" ("Still Don't Give A Fuck"). On "Rock Bottom" in an opposite sombre tone, he relates the lack of respect for his skills to his financial situation: "I'm a nervous wreck/I deserve respect/But I work a sweat for this worthless check/Bout to burst this tech, at somebody to reverse this debt." Eminem also shows off his ability to switch from one voice to another more frequently than on his two previous albums. Aside from the voice on "Rock Bottom," we are also introduced to the popular nerdy, nasalized voice that Eminem often uses to point hypocrisies, as a humour device, or to depict irony on "My Name Is" and, in "Still Don't Give A Fuck" Eminem uses a voice that is harsh and brash to depict his anger and unrepentant attitude.

2000: THE MARSHALL MATHERS LP

The Marshall Mathers LP (2000), Em's second album after he signed with Dre's label, can be seen as Eminem's reply to the media and public's responses and all of the negative hype following *The SSLP*. From the intro, "Public Service Announcement 2000" to the final song "Criminal," Eminem achieves a level of textual maturity throughout the entire album that was not found on *The SSLP*. While more serious in nature, through much of *The Marshall Mathers LP* Eminem shows that he places much emphasis on the responses to his music, but he does this through repeated references that he does not care about what others think about his work. Neil Strauss explains:

> The great joke of "The Marshall Mathers LP" is that it begins with an announcement saying that Eminem doesn't care what anyone thinks about him and then continues with song after song revealing a thin-skinned rapper who is obsessed with every comment made about him. ... Thus, we leave Eminem at a critical juncture, in danger of becoming a self-perpetuating response loop: he creates controversial music, is criticized for it and then makes even more controversial music in response. (Strauss 2001)

While the album appears to follow the same sequence as *The SSLP*, the content, rhyming patterns, and use of voice are more mature and deliberate on *The MMLP*. Here, Em shows us a more grown-up, sarcastic, and angry Slim Shady, however, he is also wiser, more controlled, and thus better able to "diss" detractors in his rhymes. Though he avoids overusing the nasalized voice(s) from his previous album, Em still demonstrates the vocal talents at his disposal. The album is delivered in a wide range of tones: the harshness of "The Way I Am," the playfulness of "Under the Influence," the heart-

rending poignancy of "Stan," and the string of multiple voices he uses in one stretch of "Criminal." Eminem (2000: 4) explains these changes in *Angry Blonde*:

> It got to a point where I wasn't just worried about getting the rhyme out sayin' it, I was worried about my pronunciation, about saying shit with authority, or even sometimes saying it softly. That's why I played with the mic a lot more on The Marshall Mathers album. I didn't just say my lyrics in one tone, spit the verse and that was it. I learned to play with my voice. I made it do more things that I didn't really know I could do. [...] After *The Marshall Mathers LP* I upgraded everything. Flow, rhyme character, and the whole shebang.

Two of the most common subjects on the album are the literal interpretation of Eminem's work and his response to appeals that he fix the harmful content in his lyrics. Eminem was criticized severely for what he did on *The SSLP*. He responds by pointing his finger at the absurdities of seeing him as some kind of role model for his younger fans and by launching attacks at his pop-star status. In "I'm Back" he uses Slim Shady to rap about how both he and the persona have evolved into "heroes" for kids who connect to rebellious music: "I take each individual degenerate's head and reach into it/just to see if he's influenced by me if he listens to music/And if he feeds into this shit he's an innocent victim/and becomes a puppet on the string of my tennis shoe." The majority of *The MMLP*'s songs, therefore, target either directly or indirectly the media and the cultural or political criticism that would have Eminem take more responsibility for the subjects and words in his rhymes. In "Who Knew," Em relays his uneasiness with fame and his disbelief over his quick rise to the echelons of mainstream pop-music:

> How many retards'll listen to me
> And run up in the school shootin' when they're pissed at a
> Teach-er, her, him, is it you, is it them?
> "Wasn't me, Slim Shady said to do it again!"
> Damn! How much damage can you do with a pen?
> Man, I'm just as fucked up as you woulda been
> If you was in my shoes, who woulda thought
> Slim Shady would be somethin' that you woulda bought
> That would make you get a gun and shoot at a cop
> I just said it — I ain't know if you'd do it or not

The theme of *The MMLP*, therefore, is life after fame, for Eminem, Marshall Mathers, and Slim Shady. Since he can no longer rap about poverty, he raps about how the success of *The SSLP* created unforeseen changes that he has difficulty adjusting to in his personal and performance lives. For most rappers, the transition from struggling

rapper to huge commercial success would have been a daunting one, especially for a white rapper, but Em handles this critical moment with relative ease. Fame did not erase his anger; it dispensed it to other areas. Now, as a member of the privileged upper-class, he faced a new challenge: maintaining his street credibility. His feelings on poverty, violence, and the lack of material wealth he experienced only a few years earlier in his life still form a prominent part of the content of his rhymes, but his outrage has shifted from personal concern over urban poverty to current events, the values of mainstream society, its media, and the perceptions of rappers as thugs. Thus, in "Amityville" (a song about Detroit) Eminem relays how the hardness of Detroit's streets allows him to maintain his street credibility. Since "rap refers its authority to represent back to the hood, gang, or crew, and makes an issue of whether the rapper has stayed true to the members of that constituency" (Sartwell 1998: 166), this song allows Eminem to show that he has maintained his connections to the streets:

> That's why we don't call it Detroit, we call it Amityville ('Ville)
> You can get capped after just havin' a cavity filled (filled)
> Ahahahaha, that's why we're crowned the murder capital still (still)
> This ain't Detroit this is motherfuckin' Hamburger Hill! (Hill)
> We don't do drive-bys, we park in front of houses and shoot
> And when the police come we fuckin' shoot it out with them too!
> That's the mentality here (here) that's the reality here (here)
> Did I just hear somebody say they wanna challenge me here???

Furthermore, on "Marshall Mathers" he maintains his disdain for the underground perceptions of him, thus showing that despite the disrespect he still receives, he is still aware of what is going on there: "The underground just spunned around and did a 360/Now these kids diss me and act like some big sissies/'Oh, he just did some shit with Missy/so now he thinks he's too big to do some shit with MC Get-Bizzy'."

Though Eminem does continue to represent the hood in his songs, he also reveals how the pressures of success and his quick rise to the top have forced him to change certain aspects of his rhymes (such as the suggestions from record label executives). He both brags about and expresses a dislike of his celebrity status. Thus, Eminem counters his "Real Slim Shady" pop-star status with some different beats and lyrics that capture the familiar "Just Don't Give A Fuck" attitude from *The SSLP*. On the "The Way I Am" Eminem raps about fame and record label pressures:

I'm so sick and tired of being admired
That I wish that I would just die or get fired
And dropped from my label
Let's stop with the fables
I'm not gonna be able to
Top a "My Name Is ..."
And pigeonholed into some poppy sensation
To cop me rotation on rock-'n-roll stations

Eminem explains that the concept of "The Way I Am" came from his label's demands for another Slim Shady song, similar to "My Name Is," Eminem, however, had other ideas. He wrote "The Way I Am," because he was "kinda rebelling against the label by letting them know they couldn't force me to do something I didn't want to" (2000: 89).

Thus, while Eminem stresses that he has not overhauled the anger that is essential to his rap style, changes to his boast tracks suggest a slight modification that could be due to changes in his lifestyle. Now that other rappers no longer undermine his rap skills because of his race, Eminem boasts about his unprecedented success and financial gains. Rather than dedicate extensive verses to boasting, he just slips in the occasional line to remind listeners of his success: "It's funny; 'cause at the rate I'm goin' when I'm thirty/I'll be the only person in the nursin' home flirtin" ("The Real Slim Shady"), starts off "I'm Back" with "I murder a rhyme one word at a time," and furthermore on "Criminal," he boasts "My words are like a dagger with a jagged edge."

Today, few rappers, if any, would be understood if they attempted to spit rhymes as quickly and easily as Eminem. While others may try to imitate this, Eminem counters by incorporating elements of confused fictional and personal narratives into the image of a street thug. The changes from each of his albums reveal the need to maintain a fresh, individual voice that is distinctly hip-hop. Since Eminem is white, proving his skills is more difficult than it would be for black rappers, since he must show that he deserves to be considered as a "legitimate" member of the hip-hop community on a consistent basis. In response, Eminem has matured over the course of these four albums, using his voice, narratives, and imagination more effectively. Most importantly, he has managed to maintain a strong line between his pop-star and hip-hop images. While he does not always use the image of a gangsta to relay his hip-hop connections, Eminem upholds his credibility with poignant stories about his childhood, the poverty he experienced, and his constant struggle for respect as an emcee. Furthermore, he does not ignore how fame has

affected his life, and incorporates this new narrative into his already existing descriptions of Shady. The creativity that Em puts into developing this Shady character and narrative, although quite obviously elements surrounding a white thug, gives Em that desired individual and therefore credible hip-hop voice.

Notes

[1] For a more detailed analysis of rap's genres, see Adam Krims (2000). Chapter 2. "A genre system for rap music," in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 46-92).

[2] The "E" refers to Eazy-E, the NWA member who rapped this sequence.

[3] This song takes on greater significance when we consider the kind of love-song writing that Eminem would put on his subsequent albums, "Just the Two of Us"/"'97 Bonnie and Clyde" and "Kim." On the latter, a prequel to the former, Eminem describes an argument with his wife that ends with her dead, and him throwing her body into the trunk of his car. On "Just the Two of Us," he and his daughter dispose of Kim's body in a river. Compare this with Guns n' Roses "Used to Love Her."

[4] White and Cones III (1999: 59) describe these attributes as a distinct sound that black performers had used to express their complex views on race, hypocrisy, and social contradictions embedded in American neo-colonial values.

CHAPTER 4: KEEPIN' IT REAL IN A FANTASY WORLD: PERSONA, PARODY, AND PLAY IN EMINEM'S LYRICS

Historically, hip-hop has is viewed as the culture of urban blacks, and rap, as a term linked to hip-hop, has become recognized widely as a musical form that only blacks can understand or employ correctly (Sernhede 1994: 264). This argument assumes that black individuals should relate to hip-hop culture because of their race, and even though hip-hop has been seen as a "black thing" for about twenty-five years, this remains a volatile contention. However, the precedence established by Vanilla Ice's misappropriation of hip-hop cultural forms is reason enough for the hip-hop community to be suspicious of whites who relate their own underclass connections to a love of hip-hop. Such opinions have also created a proliferation of opinions both inside and outside the hip-hop community linking the authenticity of hip-hop performance with black urbanity (Baker 1993: 82). Vanilla Ice's false claims of an urban lifestyle resulted in his quick dismissal from hip-hop culture, but his "contributions" set whites years back in terms of acceptance in the hip-hop community.

Despite the many years that have passed since Vanilla Ice's "Ice, Ice Baby," white rappers continue to deal with credibility issues that are different from those facing other black hip-hop artists. Eminem has proven repeatedly that his connection to hip-hop's urban identity is rooted in personal experiences and has even shown that his style is as far from Vanilla Ice as say, that of Snoop Dogg from Public Enemy's. Critics overlook Eminem's pure emcee skills and direct their attention toward issues of authenticity and belonging in hip-hop. As credibility in the hip-hop community can be fleeting, often disappearing as quickly as it appears, all rappers must prove continually that they have the skills to adapt as hip-hop itself evolves. However, as a white rapper, Em continues to be evaluated under a set of standards different from those applied to other rappers. Thus, Eminem is always in need of new ways to demonstrate that he deserves hip-hop respect, all the while acknowledging that the next time out he has to be just that much better.

In this chapter, I evaluate how the elements of parody, persona, and play allow Eminem to stand apart from other rappers and thus maintain his credibility as a hip-hop star. His skilled use of these elements permit him to float around in the grey area that exists between his fantasy and real worlds. While this ambiguity between his public

images is a critical part of his work, through which most of his critics search for aspects of truth, Eminem himself does not pretend that these narratives should be interpreted as real. In fact, he reserves much of his current Slim Shady work to chide those who take what he says as real. In incorporating "black" traits in a fictional white body, Shady exposes the hypocrisies and contradictions within views that define whites and blacks in opposition, thus exposing the latent racism that supports the dominant structure. Eminem's creation of multiple personalities allows him to move about freely, adopting the traits of a gangsta in some songs, the nerd, the doting father, and even the inner-child who deals with parental abandonment issues through the angst and pain of a young man with deep emotional scars. Finally, nothing and no one is safe from Eminem's parody — not even Eminem himself — as everyone, his mother, his critics, other artists, and his status as a super-star white rapper have become the prime targets of his scorn.

SHADY CREATIVITY TO MAKE IT IN THE RAP GAME

In the May 2000 *Rolling Stone* review of Eminem's *The Marshall Mathers LP* (2000), columnist Touré offers high praise for what the rapper delivers on the album that would go on to sell over 17 million copies worldwide.[1] In naming Eminem's lyrical complexity, humour, and disaffection as prime reasons for the album's superiority, Touré claimed that Eminem's assertions that his disturbing imagination caters to the need for over-sensationalist hype is not as far-fetched as his critics would have us believe. In the midst of this review, Touré puts forward a strong theoretical backdrop for examining the difficulties Eminem will always face even though he shows strong skill levels and makes insightful contributions to hip-hop culture:

> [Eminem] is, simply, better than any MC in hip-hop except for Jay-Z — yes, better than Beanie Siegel, Pharoahe Monch, Snoop, Common, Prodigy, Xzibit, Redman, Big Pun, and all of the Lox. It feels dangerous to think of a white boy nearing the aesthetic zenith of the celebration of black maleness called hip-hop, but just as blacks have to be twice as good to get ahead in life, to get ahead in hip-hop Eminem has had to be twice as ill.

Touré's description provides an interesting way of examining how Eminem has changed the rap game. Indeed, his crazed imagination, parody-styled lyrics, narratives, and creation of persona have allowed him to make innovative contributions to hip-hop narrative. While fantasy has always played an important role in rap — despite what rap's

critics would have you believe, most rappers are *not* pulling gats on unsuspecting citizens in between recording hit records — Eminem uses this fantasy aspect differently from studio gangstas. His most bizarre stories are often told from the perspective of the fictional, sometimes-gangsta-sometimes-nerdy alter ego Slim Shady, who allows Eminem to achieve hip-hop success through a rap style that is identifiable as neither distinctly black nor specifically white.

Instead of strutting an overt self-assurance — an essential trait for rappers — Em tends to convey the exact opposite state in most of his lyrics. Through self-ridicule, his self-depreciating lyrics often display a relative unease in dealing with his success and incredulity at how the content of his rhymes have been perceived by society. More importantly, through Shady, I believe that Eminem dispels certain myths that see social antagonism, economic and social poverty, and a deviant public image as personality traits typical of black youth only. The key difference between Shady and black youth is skin colour; that aside, the experiences based on feelings of racial exclusion, lack of family support, and dysfunctional views on love all drive Shady/Eminem/Marshall Mathers in a similar manner to other black rappers. In merging parts of his personal biography with Shady's fictional narrative, Eminem points to media biases where white families are concerned, as well as middle America's presumptions about black and white men, the poverty-stricken, and the underclass. Thus, Shady is not just a representative of thugs from the inner-city but, to the horror of most members of the dominant group, he is also the voice of America's middle-class children:

> Eminem's not the first rapper to have bad or no relations with a parent. DMX has spoken about his mother with similar disdain. It's the same pain that inspired WC and Madd Circle's "Fuck My Dad," Jay-Z's "Where Have You Been" (featuring Beanie Sigel) and many others. But usually, the representation of *white* American families in the media is more balanced, with more emphasis on the nuclear ideal (husband, wife and 2.5 kids). Eminem however, informs us that dysfunction isn't just limited to Marcy and South Philly baby boys. (Parker 2002: 118)

Eminem's ability to tread between the black and white perceptions of race has called into question the validity of the race dichotomy in the US that defines whiteness as "pure" and blackness in opposite terms (Sartwell 1998: 15). This binary has always been supported by rap images that depict black men as gang members and black women as

unwed mothers, thus handing white Americans the ammunition they need to oppress blacks and suppress blackness. Rap, however, has usually employed stereotypes as a way of confronting the stereotypes (which is lost on most of its critics and teen consumers). Eminem also uses stereotype as a tool, reverts both white and black stereotypes by acting in what is perceived as a black manner, and thus threatens the positive image that white Americans have developed for themselves. Cripsin Sartwell (ibid. 14) explains that race in the US is conceived through a "*rigid* dichotomy [in which one] must turn out to be black *or* white" (emphasis added). Consequently, when Eminem employs a "black style" to reveal that he has always felt alienated from the "white lifestyle," many white people become uncomfortable and feel betrayed. Thus, Sartwell can argue that "what we seek to make visible in black folks by an amazingly elaborate and publicly conducted process of enforcement is precisely what [whites] seek to make invisible in [themselves]; to see the real criminal, [whites would] have to look in the mirror" (ibid. 190). This mirror is no longer a necessity with Eminem, which explains why he receives so much attention from critics. Since Eminem insists that hip-hop has always been an important part of his white life, other white people who have denied systematically that hip-hop bears a connection to whites are forced to confront the fact that segregation along the lines of colour may not be relevant anymore. As Sartwell also explains, this act of looking in the mirror makes the "oppressor visible to himself as an oppressor ... [removing] the shroud of generality in which white culture wraps black bodies" (ibid. 11). Peter McLaren further reiterates Sartwell's concerns in a direct relationship with rap music:

> Rap is a powerful offensive medium in the way that it raises havoc with white middle-class complicity in and complacency with institutionalized racism; ... it ruptures consensual images of blacks whom middle-class whites wish would "know their place." ... Rap unmakes feelings of security and safety in middle-class homes and neighbourhoods. It indexes areas of concrete rage and generalized despair that are normally hidden from the official view of American democracy. (McLaren 1999: 36.)

Since white culture is based on the rejection of everything associated with blackness (i.e. whites are *not* ruled by bodily desires), it is "continually threatened by the re-eruption of what has been ejected [from white culture], which also constitutes its deepest desire" (Sartwell 1998: 187). The denial of this deep-seeded desire, Sartwell argues in a first-person account, is the crux of rap's commodity culture: "in yearning to be

[my favourite rappers], I am yearning to be what I am not, or yearning to be what I have excluded from myself; I am yearning to become my other" (ibid. 184). Again, we can assess how Sartwell's personal comments relate to the new teen experience with Eminem. These white kids who idolize Em are no longer "yearning to be what they are not," but wanting to be like the white rapper who "belongs" in hip-hop. Eminem is not "their other"; thus, this connection to him can be seen in different terms as well. Furthermore, Sartwell states: "[r]ap peddles these desires to white culture as commodity, but that in itself constitutes an act of resistance; it is an artful destruction of white culture that is also the self-destruction of white culture. We are now confronted with the other in ourselves; our children purchase it and desire it (that is, desire to desire)" (ibid. 187).

Between 2000 and 2001, Neil Strauss, a *New York Times* music critic and one of Eminem's biggest supporters, wrote consistently about his respect and admiration not only for *The Marshall Mathers LP* but also for the ways in which Eminem shapes his music to show that he is a symptom of society, rather than the root of its problems. In attempting to locate why so many people hold such negative views of Em's work, he found that many of the people with whom he spoke based their opinions on what they had heard about Eminem through other sources. Strauss uses these findings to explain the over-sensationalized hype over Em's Shady persona: "Thus, the story of a persona or artwork diverges more and more from its reality as it is perpetuated and embellished" (Strauss 2001). Furthermore, Strauss likens much of Eminem's persona/parody-work to the roles played by actors, indicating that Eminem is no more responsible for Shady's actions than Anthony Hopkins is for those of Hannibal Lecter: "Eminem is playing a character, a very flawed one, and it is to his credit as a writer and performer that he plays it so convincingly. True, the character may have an element of the real Eminem in him, but for some that is often what art is for, finding a constructive outlet for certain antisocial tendencies" (ibid).

Today, the Slim Shady persona is a defining aspect of Eminem's success. Eminem works this aspect of fiction into his work by maintaining a level of confusion as to where one persona ends and the other begins. By shifting skilfully between his various identities at will, Eminem succeeds in an area where previous white rap artists, such as Vanilla Ice and the Beastie Boys, have had less success. He is thus able to adopt the traits associated

with the lifestyle of underclass black youth (important for his hip-hop credibility) within the presence of a "disaffected white boy" (an important part of his marketability to suburban teens) as prime aspect of his rhymes. Eminem also uses his three self-referencing personas[2] (Slim Shady, Eminem, and Marshall Mathers) to re-affirm his connection to the inner-city and the lifestyle associated with ghetto youth, as well as to claim a place as a legitimate hip-hop force. These characters are changed depending upon the feelings Eminem is trying to portray and in relation to changes occurring in the hip-hop community.

While the mobility of these characters can be used to suggest that hip-hop identity has become an artificial and constructed matter of choice, a theory I borrow from post-modernism (Kellner 1991: 153), the fictionalization of identity has always played a significant role in hip-hop performance. Rappers usually adopt a performance name that becomes an essential part of their rap identity. Briefly, the tradition of adopting performing names can be traced all the way back to b-boy culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s when graffiti artists, wanting recognition for their work but unable to sign their legal/government names, developed tags to prevent getting caught. These tags became linked to the graffiti artist's identity and were recognizable to members of the hip-hop community. Furthermore, as graffiti art can be seen as a way of reclaiming public space and forcing white culture to confront blackness/hip-hop culture, tags could be seen as replacing identity in the non-hip-hop world and as defiance of white authority.

Rappers have also adopted their performance names in much the same manner as b-boys. Their government identities are replaced by their hip-hop image. For instance, LL COOL J (Ladies Love Cool James) often raps about his "powerful" allure over women, which has become an essential part of his hip-hop performance image. Rap names/tags can illicit fear, such as the "Big Pun(isher)" and "C-Murder," or show the rapper's defiance of societal norms, such as "The Pharcyde" and "Ludacris." Rappers have also developed aliases for their performance names (Jay-Z has Jigga and (Jay)-Hovah). Eminem, however, uses his rap performance identity in a different manner from other rappers. He has developed and refined Slim Shady's personality over the course of his albums in such a manner that Slim Shady has taken on its own character traits, rooted in "personal" experiences that can be seen separately from those of Eminem/Marshall Mathers. Eminem

describes Shady as a flawed, foul-mouthed, wanna-be thug, who turned to the *negative* aspects of hip-hop's street-culture to block out the outside world. Although Eminem does control Shady's actions and re-actions, rather than place the responsibility for this attitude on his own shoulders, he often deflects criticism for what many see as a lack of morals and social responsibility toward the public scrutiny, mass media hype, and those same people who pass judgment on him. I admit that this kind of separation of his personas creates a multitude of problems; the most obvious is that it eliminates the elements of complexity that went into the original creation of these personas and which remains as Eminem continues to refine their traits. As the narrative around these figures also reveal intricate personas, Foden (2001) also believes that it does Eminem a great disservice to reduce them to one-dimensional characters:

> The mistake [Em's] critics make is to see the songs as direct statements made by the singer rather than discrete aesthetic objects. Is it inconceivable that the man who wrote Stan should also want to stab you in the head if "you're a fag or lez"? Not necessarily, but Eminem's critics should "relax a little" as he advises Stan — should consider that this might be an artist toying with the place where celebrity and palatability meet, by passing deliberately the inflammatory statements and by parodying less thoughtful rappers.

Rather than relying exclusively on the cool pose and thug attitude, Em establishes his disdain through spoofs of current events and by revealing disgust over his personal success. Through his style, he can approach certain fears in a manner that is less confrontational visually. For instance, the majority of his videos usually do not exhibit a connection to hip-hop's cool pose. Instead, Eminem forms a portion of his Shady identity through the appropriation of the identities of multiple current event stars,[3] insinuating that some of Shady's deviance is due to their actions, rather than placing the blame solely with the inner-city lifestyle he experienced during his youth. Thus, he is not just adopting these traits for the purposes of youth rebellion. Most important to understanding the shifting Slim Shady/Eminem identities is how, through threats to mainstream morality, these personas can be interpreted as being "intent on dismantling the hierarchy of knowledge and values, undermining all that gives meaning and all that has been erected as paradigm or model" (Benko 1997: 8).

Em's style disrupts two longstanding models. The first is the way in which manhood is presented and won in hip-hop. Black rappers would hardly admit to taking

severe beatings from other kids, however, Eminem discusses this openly, suggesting that this aspect of his (white) life is what drove his love of hip-hop. Since Eminem has redefined the art of battling, other rappers do not want to get involved in a clash of wits with him. While revenge seeking is intrinsic to hip-hop, Eminem's musings about vigil ante justice against his own bullies are exactly that — musings. Despite this, other rappers rarely question Eminem's manhood (again, a purported manhood based on street toughness an essential part of the rap image). Second, he disturbs the notion of traits that are specific along colour lines. Not only does Eminem use Shady to show the absurdity that certain street-based characteristics have become associated with black urban males, but through for instance, "Guilty Conscience" and "Kill You," he vents an out-of-control hostility that has become a defining part of the both his rap star and Shady persona. As with the stereotypes associated with black youth from the hood, Eminem performs Shady as everything negative in excess — violent, evil, and hyper-masculine — combined with his "Just Don't Give A Fuck" attitude. On this single, which first appeared on 1997's *The Slim Shady EP*, and later on the LP version, Eminem describes Shady's personality traits, which, in retrospect, have shaped how many critics now define Eminem: "Slim Shady, Eminem was the old initials (Bye-Bye)/Extortion, snortin, supportin abortion/Pathological liar, blowin shit out of proportion/The looniest, zaniest, spontaneous, sporadic/Impulsive thinker, compulsive drinker, addict/Half man, half animal."

The attitude Eminem tries to convey through Shady is that of an unapologetic and uncaring man, which is a key aspect exclusive to *this* persona. Conversely, when speaking as Eminem, as his work on "Stan," "Who Knew," and "Role Model" shows, he does consider the possible influence of his rhymes and Shady persona, just the same as "The Way I Am," "Renagade," and "Without Me" are ruminations on Shady's effect on both Eminem and Marshall Mathers. This freewheeling shifting between rap identities is essential to Eminem's success in hip-hop and prevents his marginalization within the hip-hop community. It affords him the opportunity to demonstrate, not only his rhyming and lyrical abilities — important skills in rap — but also to show off his aptitude in the blending of the boundary between his real and fictionalized biographies. While these personas provide Eminem with a wide range of styles and complex narrative(s), in the public eye, Eminem and Marshall Mathers ironically, are still seen through their

association with Slim Shady. Slim's personality traits have become their personality traits and vice versa. Eminem uses this transfer of personality traits to strengthen his rhymes and further develop his use of play. Through incorporating these personas into his lyrics, Eminem further employs the realm of exaggerated fantasy, and through a mocking self-parody is thus able to erase the distinctions between a fictional criminal lifestyle, the struggle as a member of the urban underclass, and race.

Eminem's identities can thus be seen as a criticism of the race dichotomy in the US. In applying a black lifestyle to his white body, Em thus "signals the artificiality of identity" (Kellner 1991: 153). His creation and (re)construction of Shady's out-of-control attributes are those associated with black ghetto youth; however, in applying these to the fictional white Slim Shady, Eminem also points out society's discriminatory tendencies where such youth are concerned. As a performance, Shady shows that these gangsta traits cannot be limited to black Americans. Since he also articulates and conveys this idea through the emulation of a black sound and acknowledges such contributions to his life, Shady guides the mainstream to acknowledge that the negativity associated with an attraction to a hip-hop lifestyle is no longer race-related: "identity is often constructed ... *against* dominant conventions and morality; thus, there is something amoral or morally threatening about post-modern selves" (ibid. 156, emphasis original).

Through his unique style, Eminem also confronts issues around whiteness and hip-hop. He claims that he could be one of the children growing up in suburban homes, envisioning various scenarios of revenge on any number of people, and thus assumes a position that creates much more discomfort for his critics. Rather than hide behind his whiteness, Eminem uses it as a tool to incite a fear that is similar to the fear that NWA and other gangsta rappers created around the image of urban blacks. He reminds white society that, despite the condemnation, "there's a Slim Shady in all of us" ("The Real Slim Shady") and indicates that Shady is a construction of the exact ideals white America wants to keep hidden. Even more threatening is that Eminem exposes these contradictions using a black style, through skin that is very obviously white, with little resistance from the hip-hop community. Unlike Vanilla Ice who was deemed "unfit," a poser, and, more importantly, "uncool" (which more than erased his influence over his white fans), Eminem has the support of not only Dre, Snoop, Xzibit, and Jay-Z, but also that of old

school rappers like Chuck D and Rakim. He thus becomes more problematic for white America because the hip-hop community has not "taken care of the problem" by exiling Em. In appreciating his music, his white fans can maintain a "cool" connection to hip-hop culture. All of these nuances separate Em from other rappers and allow him to accomplish what Simpson (1996: 115-116) describes as the moment of authentic presence: "[t]he only way to prove that you are the best rapper is to *claim* it in the most creative, provocative, and interesting way. ... There is a quest to continually create new styles, new 'flavours,' and to display the best rhyming skill" (emphasis original).

SLIM ATTACKS: EMINEM'S PARODY VICTIMS

Shady, Eminem's most popular persona is also where the rapper shows the most creativity and displays the most potential for violence. Shady can exhibit the personality of a self-conscious nerdy anti-hero such as the identity on "My Name Is" and, at times, that of the out-of-control gangsta who seeks both physical and verbal revenge on his enemies in "Brain Damage." Eminem/Shady are rebels, since they employ blackness as a means of escape, they appeal to the millions of "invisible" teens who believe that this music speaks to them. Eminem describes himself as the kid who was an easy target for bullies: "A kid who refused to respect adults/Wore spectacles with taped frames and a freckled nose/A corny looking white boy, scrawny and always ornery/Cause I was always sick of brawny bullies pickin' on me." In the case of this song, he also creates a fantasy-revenge sequence directed at a kid who bullied him, using a whiny-nasalized "bratty teen" voice, to depict the position of a kid who has had enough:

> One day he came in the bathroom while I was pissin'
> And had me in the position to beat me into submission
> He banged my head against the urinal till he broke my nose
> Soaked my clothes in blood, grabbed me and choked my throat
> I tried to plead and tell him, "We shouldn't beef"
> But he wouldn't leave me, he kept chokin' me and I couldn't breathe
> He looked at me and said, "You gonna die honkey!"
> [...]
> Then I got up and ran to the janitor's storage room
> Kicked the door hinge loose and ripped out the four-inch screws
> Grabbed some sharp objects, brooms, and foreign tools
> "This is for every time you took my orange juice,
> Or stole my seat in the lunchroom and drank my chocolate milk.
> Every time you tipped my tray and it dropped and spilt.
> I'm getting you back bully! Now, once and for good."

I cocked the broomstick back and swung as hard as I could
And beat him over the head with it till I broke the wood
Knocked him down, stood on his chest with one foot

It should be noted that although there is some truth to the first part of this narrative (the bullying), Em's revenge did not occur until it became a part of this song. However, in rapping that he "gets" his bully, Eminem appeals to the teens who want to put a stop to the bullying they face at school. This depiction explains the appeal of the Shady persona: "it captures perfectly the feelings of outrage and powerlessness that often accompany — indeed, perhaps define — adolescence. ... Such an attitude speaks directly to adolescent anomie and rebellion. While surely annoying adults, it isn't evil" (Doherty 2001).

HIS STAR STATUS

Eminem's newest single "Without Me," from his 2002 release *The Eminem Show*, explores how his Slim Shady persona has taken over all of Eminem's images. In it, he explores the hype around Shady, the FCC's attempts at censorship, and the attention he receives from his critics. Far from being one of his more "serious songs" Em manages to examine how both he and Shady give these critics an external force to blame for the problems with "their" children. In the chorus, Eminem mocks his critics with a catchy and insightful hook that refers to the targeting of him over other musicians: "Now this looks like a job for me/So, everybody just follow me/Cause we need a little controversy/Cause, it feels so empty without me." Through "Without Me," Eminem manages to stay true to his form, and sticks out his tongue at his critics and his fans:

I've created a monster cuz nobody wants ta
See Marshall no more they want Shady
I'm chopped liver
Well if you want Shady, this is what I'll give ya
A little bit of weed mixed with some hard liquor
Some vodka that'll jump-start my heart quicker than a
Shock when I get shocked at the hospital by the doctor
When I'm not cooperating
When I'm rockin the table while he's operating

Many of Eminem's songs before "Without Me" deal with his un-ease with fame also indicate that part of this discomfort is related to the widespread appeal of Shady:

So, do I gotta buy a whole block to myself
A front door with twelve locks

And have a bodyguard walk me out to my mailbox
And every time somebody makes a threat, run and tell cops?
Fuck that, I protect myself with these twelve shots
And one in the chamber, gun in the waist
And one in the ankle, waitin for someone to come to my place
Tryin to walk up and knock like these cock suckers are NOT
Gonna get a shotgun or a glock shoved in their face?
And it's a disgrace that Hailie can't play with her toys
In the front yard without you drivin by honkin your horn
Screamin some shit, leanin out your windows, beepin n shit
Or pullin up in my drive like I won't leapin your whip
And so these kids tell their friends and relatives where I live
So my address ends up on the Internet again
So then, I do an interview with *Spin* telling them
That if someone comes to my crib, I'ma shove a gun in their ribs
And reporters blow it out of proportion
"Oh, now he's pullin guns on his fans
Just for tryin to stand on his porch"
And I'm the bad guy because I don't answer my door like "HEY, hi!
You guys want some autographs? Okay, form a straight line!"
Sometimes I feel like loadin this rifle
And climbin the roof at night and hidin outside to snipe you
It's not that I don't like you ...
It's just that when I'm not behind the mic
I'm a person who's just like you

— "Don't Approach Me"

The Marshall Mathers LP's "I'm Back" is another song where Eminem raps about his disdain for new, post-fame life. Similar to the theme of "Without Me" it is based on humour and parody, but unlike "Without Me," the parts of "I'm Back" that reveal disillusionment with his new life are told through an angry, fed-up voice. Much of the content on "I'm Back" is Eminem's familiar twisted humour as he condemns the "degenerate heads" that have become manipulated by his music and take what Eminem says as real. He also targets the ever-present and continued public and media eye:

I used to give a fuck — now I could give a fuck less
What do I think of success? It sucks, too much press, stress
Too much cess, depressed, too upset
It's just too much mess, I guess
I must just blew up quick (yes)
Grew up quick (no) was raised right
Whatever you say is wrong, what ever I say's right
You think of my name now whenever you say "Hi"
Became a commodity because I'm W-H-I-T-E,
'cause MTV was so friendly to me
Can't wait till Kim sees me
Now is it worth it? Look at my life, how is it perfect?

The excerpts from "I'm Back" and "Without Me" are prime examples of where and how Eminem tries to separate himself from gang-banging traditions in hip-hop. Unlike the gangstas from the mid-1990s who embraced the attitude of thugs, although thriving on it, Eminem is also disgusted with it. Despite the numerous ways that he insists that Slim's thug traits exist in a fantasy alter ego, they are still relayed to Eminem's other personas. This is precisely what allows Eminem to comment on the hypocrisies and contradictions that exist in society. Each year that he has become more successful, Eminem has refined the images of his personas and adapted Slim Shady in relation to his increased popularity. In addition to his use of persona, Eminem also uses parody and play within the narratives of his personas to create images that challenge conventions of US society at every turn. Obviously, as fictional characters there has to be a level of parody within these narratives, however, Eminem also bases his parody on his changing views on American life, his critics (political, cultural or familial), and even his rising popularity.

HIS STATUS A "WHITE" RAPPER AND A ROLE MODEL

By parodying his whiteness and the dominant perceptions around race-related traits, Eminem creates a distinct method for showing America its racist tendencies where black (inner-city) youth are concerned. Em adopts several traits of a gangsta and shows off the real "face" of poverty, at the same time dispelling certain myths about the supposed superiority of whites, and the purported inferiority of white emcees. In moreover doing so through a fictional alter ego, Eminem reveals that the influence of hip-hop culture for white Americans runs deeper than most people want to admit. This kind of parody is effective at reminding America about social disintegration because it pulls away from the perceptions that most white Americans hold about blacks and hip-hop and shows that the effects of poverty have touched both sides of the American race dichotomy.

Sartwell offers a critique of white culture's relation to rap music and hip-hop through stereotype. He argues that stereotype is "a mode of ejection, an attempt to insulate the [white] culture from aspects of its own humanity that it perceives as threatening or bizarre" (1998: 185) and relates this to the negative perceptions associated with poor whites from the Southern US. Thus, just as the culture of poor whites from the South stands in opposition to "real whiteness," the white, trailer park trash epithet that we

link with Eminem makes this stereotype visible in an inner-city context. Eminem poses a threat to the purity of white culture because he unmasks a weakness in the positive framing of whiteness. Thus, rather than confront the issues of white urban poverty, the dominant white group instead "exposes" Eminem as a social deviant who poses a threat to "our" children. However, Eminem is not just a danger to white children, but more importantly, he is a threat to "'our' values, 'our' children, 'our' culture" (ibid. 187).

"What if I was White," is a Sticky Fingaz song featuring Eminem. Both Em and Sticky examine the black-verses-white issue in American life. Black rapper Sticky Fingaz provides the interludes that point to society's double standards for blacks and whites. To introduce this song, Sticky recalls a dream where he was white, but in describing this dream to Shady, he is unable to decide if it was a good dream or a nightmare. He goes through several verses, musing about what life would have been like, had he been born white: "What if I was white skin the same color as cocaine?/Blond hair, blue eyes, the whole shebang/I know one thing; police wouldn't always be watching me/Pull me over for nothing, constantly jockin me/The yellow cabs in the city would stop for me/I wouldn't need collateral to buy property." At the same time as discussing the benefits of whiteness, in one of Sticky's verses, Eminem cuts in to remind listeners how his own experiences with whiteness prove contrary to Stick's beliefs about the better life whiteness would bring:

[Sticky] If I was white
It would be a different world for me
If I was white (ummmmmmmm?) What shade would I be?
Would I be Redneck or Skinhead, preppy or high class?
[Eminem] YOU PROBABLY LIVE IN A TRAILER PARK AND BE WHITE TRASH!!! HA! HA!

As performance is key to any hip-hop artist, Em also manipulates the responses of the dominant group in society by giving them something and someone controversial enough to talk about, something he addresses openly on "Without Me." In playing upon his critics' responses, Em also identifies their own hypocrisies, indicating that he has become a scapegoat for problems that also exist in their "unscathed" sectors of society. Since he all but admits that he is conforming to generalized way of interpreting rappers, feeding into society's belief that rappers are social deviants, Em's most victimized casualty of parody is his star status. He parodies his personas, Shady and Em, and the

perceptions of them through poignant self-ridicule and self-depreciation.

According to Potter (1995: 134-5) the act of putting hip-hop in the realm of the spectacle is dangerous and impudent at the same time:

> [B]y picking up these narratives and Signifyin(g) them, [hip-hop] runs the constant risk of being collapsed and conflated *within* them by those who don't "get" the doubleness of Signifyin(g). ... To be a "player," as rappers put it, is to "play" the media game, to have the audacity to raise the stakes even when your hand may be empty. It is this kind of audacity that takes hip-hop attitude to a higher level, as the spectacle enables what might previously have been only isolated acts and "blows them up" on the giant screen of media representation. (emphasis original)

Arguably, no one in music is playin' the media game better than Eminem is right now. He does this so well that even his repeated assertions over the absurdity that his personas have become the voices of today's youth are seen as a further aspect of his parody. Regardless of his opinions on this matter, the fact is that Shady has had that harrowing an influence. As most inner-city youth are themselves seen to promote a criminalized lifestyle, often without proof, so too, is Shady seen to embody what inner-city youth seek to have represented. And, just as suburban youth adopt a spirit of rebelliousness as a way of lashing out at their parents, other authority figures, and the expectations placed upon their shoulders, Slim is also seen as a "lost child" directing much anger toward parental and educational figures and political and cultural critics.

Unfortunately, as Hutcheon (in Potter 1995: 2) points out, parody and play require a full comprehension of their double-sided nature to succeed. Instead of recognizing the artistic merits in how play takes hip-hop to a new level, rappers become victims of their own parody. They are seen through the narratives they portray, and even when a rapper is up-front about "playin" — something Em does quite frequently — they are still seen through the images generated in their songs. Specifically in relation to play, Hutcheon states, in its obvious and not so obvious forms, play "is a potentially powerful mode of resistance" (ibid.). These subtle and not-so-subtle aspects of Em's work are often lost on those outside of hip-hop's circles (including some of his fans). Most of his younger fans respond to these uses of play and only see the rebellious nature of this, rather than the intricate similes and metaphors Em employs to launch his own criticisms of society.

Eminem is at his sardonic best when he points out these misconceptions. One of

the best instances of this is in "Words Are Weapons" where he "acknowledges" the volatility of his lyrics. This track can be seen as similar to the "Public Service Announcements" that have opened his first two-major label albums. However, the intention in "Words Are Weapons" is not comedic, but suggests absurdity in the exaggerated interpretations of his words. Em delivers "Words Are Weapons" in one of his angrier tones and raps about the misconceptions of rap and his own character traits by describing random acts of violence through words that are associated with physical violence. However, he is simply referring to his rap prowess and no real threat of violence actually exists, as is the case with the threats of violence in his other songs. This is yet another "show-your-skills" rap song, but it differs considerably from that kind of work on his first album *Infinite* (1996): "My words are weapons/I use 'em to crush my opponents/My words are weapons/I never show no emotion/My words are weapons/I use 'em to kill whoever's steppin' to me/My words are like weaponry on a record."

In turning this aspect of the spectacle back onto society, Eminem plays first, with society's conceptions of the rap artist, and second, with society's understandings of its own norms and mores. The feeling he reiterates in many of his songs is made explicit in "Criminal" where he raps, "I'm a Criminal/'cause every time I write a rhyme/these people think it's a crime to tell 'em what's on my mind." Here, Eminem's crimes are much like the crimes he commits on "Words Are Weapons" and the crimes he is seen unfairly as portraying in society. Despite the criticism levelled against him, Em "insists" on producing songs about the very issue of his deviant status that stir up further debates about the effect of his words. Eminem responds to this instant targeting of his music through many of his songs by taunting US society. From "The Real Slim Shady":

> I'm like a head trip to listen to, cause I'm only givin' you
> Things you jokes about with your friends inside your living room
> The only difference is I got the balls to say it
> In front of y'all and I don't gotta be false or sugarcoat it at all
> I just get on the mic and spit it
> And whether you like to admit [ERR] I just shit it
> Better than ninety percent of you rappers out can

CRITICS, SOCIETY, AND PARENTAL NEGLECT

While critics, politicians, and other "protectors" of society misinterpret both his

lyrical content and his message, Em takes their misappropriation of his content, and turns it *back* on them. That is, he uses current events and attacks on his personas in his songs, further provoking his detractors to attack his style. Institutional critics and its leaders come under attack frequently, with Bill Clinton, an outspoken critic of not just Eminem but hip-hop culture in general, and his non-presidential activities at the centre of Eminem's scorn. In "Who Knew," he raps, "I'm sorry there must be a mix-up/You want me to fix up lyrics while our President gets his dick sucked?" and about his supposed lack of morality, "My morals went thhbbpp when the President got oral/Sex in his Oval Office on top of his desk/Off of his own employee" ("Criminal"). Further during "Criminal," in which he uses a about eight different voices, including four in the first verse alone, Eminem attacks religious groups that often harass him. In one instance, he adopts the voice of a televangelist from Southern USA to become a preacher whose behaviour is far from being indicative of what he preaches to his followers: "Please Lord, this boy needs Jesus/Heal this child, help us destroy these demons/Oh, and please send me a brand new car/And a prostitute while my wife's sick in the hospital."

The preacher/congregation allusions here deserve a bit more attention. While senators and other political leaders would have his fans described as little more than Eminem's puppets (Doherty 2001), throughout his songs Eminem ridicules the idea that there are fans who want to imitate his every move. Much like the preacher in "Criminal" whose congregation would be shaken by discovering what he really does, Eminem/Slim Shady tries to dispel any suggestions that his fans see him as a preacher of sorts. Further, in targeting President Bill Clinton, who once stood as the representative of America's Presidential Office — a "sacred" position in the US — Eminem adds more evidence for explaining the roots of Shady's deviance. He portrays Clinton in an unfavourable light (descriptions which are far from unfounded) and ponders how Em/Shady can become targets of immorality when Clinton's image is more tarnished than their public images.

In the chorus of "Bad Influence" Slim responds directly to remarks about his power on children: "People say that I'm a bad influence/I say the world's already fucked, I'm just addin' to it/They say I'm suicidal/Teenagers' newest idol/C'mon, do as I do/Go ahead get mad and do it." In the final verse of the song Eminem comments on how his personal and fictional biographies have become tangled into one and draws on what he

labels as unwarranted negative attention to his family life:

> I'm not a "Role Model," I don't wanna baby-sit kids
> I got one little girl, and Hailie Jade is Shady's business
> And Shady's just an alias I made to piss you off
> Where the fuck were you when Gilbert's paid me to dishwash[4]
> I made a couple statements and now look how crazy shit got
> You made me get a bigger attitude than eighty Kim Scotts
> And she almost got the same fate that Grady's bitch got[5]
> I knew that "Just the Two of Us" would make you hate me this much
> And "Just the Two of Us"
> That ain't got shit to do with us in our personal life
> It's just words on a mic

Eminem's reference to "Role Model" is an interesting song from *The Slim Shady LP* in which he conveys some ridiculous narrative verses about his status as a teen-idol. Again, this is a parody of his role model status, which is quite obvious from the content in the verses (he admits that he murdered Nicole Simpson and Ronald Goldman and even rips out Vanilla Ice's blonde dreads). Again, these are the kinds of songs for which Em is often lambasted in the media because first, he has the potential to corrupt children with rhymes such as: "Follow me and do exactly what the song says/Smoke weed, take pills, drop outta school, kill people and drink/And jump behind the wheel like it was still legal" and second, he is perceived as disrespecting what is considered as the "proper" way of behaving. At the same time, however, he also points to the fact that much of what he spews off is so outrageous that anyone who believes him is even more messed up than *he* is (i.e. the obsessed fan in "Stan").

Em's critics miss these aspects of his parody of US society and place too much responsibility in Em's hands. I think the main teen-appeal of Em's music is that he is the funniest figure to come out of popular music in the longest time. From "Got pissed and ripped Pamela Lee's tits off/And smacked her so hard I knocked her clothes backwards like Kris Kross" and trying to decide which Spice Girl to impregnate on "My Name Is" to "I'm anti-Backstreet and Ricky Martin/with instincts to kill NSYNC, don't get me started/These fuckin' brats can't sing and Britney's garbage/What's this bitch retarded? Gimme back my sixteen dollars" on "Marshall Mathers," part of Eminem's reputation has been built on dropping "toilet humour" lines that make fun of pop-stars whose music he views as lacking emotional substance. This, I think, is more appealing to Em's younger fans because they are references to situations, events, and people from "their world."

While the hopelessness that Stan feels is conveyed in a manner that causes listeners to empathize, most of Em's fans are unlikely to have a firsthand understanding of the personal situations (absent father, becoming a parent).

After achieving fame, Eminem incorporates the aspect of appropriation in his rhymes; however, he refers to the millions of white teens, once accused of appropriating hip-hop culture, who now sport bleached blonde hair and dress like Slim Shady. In "The Real Slim Shady" Eminem raps, "And there's a million of us just like me/who cuss like me; who just don't give a fuck like me/who dress like me, walk, talk and act like me/and just might be the next best thing but not quite me!" In "Stan" Eminem takes on the persona of Stan, an obsessed fan who wants to be exactly like Slim. Here, Eminem is quite more reflexive and sombre than in the above example: (Eminem as Stan) "see I'm just like you in away/I never knew my father neither/He used to always cheat on my mom and beat her/I can relate to what you're saying in your songs/So when I have a shitty day/I drift away and put 'em on."

On "Kill You" a song where he threatens to kill his mother and any and all other women, Eminem opens fittingly with "They say I can't rap about bein' broke no more/They ain't say I can't rap about coke no more." As the first full-length track on the album, we are introduced quickly to all of the changes in Eminem's rap style. He no longer targets the individuals from his underground days, but now all of those people who feel that because of his success, the turmoil he described on *The SSLP* should be over. "Kill You," which has become one of the most often quoted "Eminem is bad" songs, however, is not one of Eminem's angry-at-the-world anthems, in fact, it is quite the opposite, delving in a parody world. According to Eminem, the line that starts the song gives "an idea of what the [*The MMLP* is] all about. ... The whole idea of this song was to say some of the most fucked-up shit. Just to let people know that I'm back. That I didn't lose it. That I wasn't compromising nothing and I didn't change. If anything ... I got worse" (2000: 97).

As Eminem has always criticized himself before anyone else can, and from his own experiences as an underground emcee, he knows that his race is the first (and easiest) thing to target. Says Neil Strauss, "[t]here is little that anyone has said about Eminem that he hasn't already said about himself: every complaint levelled against the [*Marshall*

Mathers LP] is already anticipated in the lyrics and answered" (2001). In his explanation of cultural authenticity, Boyd states that excluded from hip-hop's world are "cultural producers who simply rely on their pop appeal rather than really enhancing the culture" (1997: 14). A large part of Eminem's success is due to this overwhelming status as a pop-icon, however, both he and Slim Shady have still been welcomed into the hip-hop community. Part of this embrace is due to the conflict Eminem creates through his responses to his own music: "Eminem presents such a grotesquely self-hating and negative image of himself that it's almost too obvious a joke when he mocks the idea that anyone would want to emulate him" (Doherty 2001).

One of the best tracks from Jay-Z's 2001 *The Blueprint*, "Renagade," is similar to Eminem's other songs in which he responds to his image. Here, Eminem and Jay-Z trade verses, commenting on their public bad boy images, the kids, and, as usual, perceptions of their music. It is through songs like this that Eminem has built his writing reputation and allowed Doherty to state that "those who think Eminem is merely a moral monster spouting filth must contend with this touching and artful portrait of a mixed-up, hopeless American kid looking to a pop star for succor and friendship — and Eminem's clearly moral response. It's a devastating and carefully drawn piece of contemporary art." The following excerpt is from one of Eminem's "Renagade" verses:

> Since I'm in a position to talk to these kids and they listen
> I ain't no politician but I'll kick it with 'em a minute
> Cause see they call me a menace; and if the shoe fits I'll wear it
> But if it don't, then y'all'll swallow the truth grin and bear it
> Now who's the King of these rude ludicrous lucrative lyrics
> Who could inherit the title, put the youth in hysterics
> Usin his music to steer it, sharin his views and his merits
> But there's a huge interference — they're sayin you shouldn't hear it
> Maybe it's hatred I spew, maybe it's food for the spirit
> Maybe it's beautiful music I made for you to just cherish
> But I'm debated disputed hated and viewed in America
> As a motherfuckin' drug addict — like you didn't experiment?

The problem with society as Eminem points out aptly, arises in the various (mis)interpretations of his narrative, be it through the media, his critics, or his fans. Eminem plays upon the mainstream's insatiable desire for hype and scapegoats through his interpretation of Slim Shady, but he himself falls victim to these same narratives. Eminem is quite open about how he came to create Slim Shady. This persona developed

partly out of Eminem's warped imagination but also from personal events and the misconceptions that many people hold about inner-city poverty and inner-city behavioural traits. However, Shady's street thug character traits are often relayed to the other personas, Eminem and Marshall Mathers. Thus, despite having separate personalities for his personas, Eminem, Marshall Mathers, and Slim Shady have become a singular entity in the non-hip-hop public eye.

On the *SSLP*, for instance, Eminem and Dr. Dre come together for the track "Guilty Conscience," a classic angel-devil story of good-versus-evil, in which the evil Slim Shady eventually wins out over the good Dr. Dre. In it, Shady and Dre "meet up" with three individuals, all of whom are at some kind of cross-road (a man about to hold up a liquor store, a boy at a rave party about to sleep with an underage girl, and a man who arrives home from work and discovers that his wife is cheating on him). Throughout, Shady and Dre spit rhymes back and forth either attempting to guide the person to walk away (Dre: "He don't need to go the same route that I went") or commit the crime (Shady: "How in the fuck you gonna tell this man not to be violent?"). The song itself is an interesting play on society's conceptions of black and white youth from the inner-city. The black OG (original gangsta), who is trying to repent, returns to his evil ways when the white wanna-be-thug pushes him in that direction. (The song ends with Dre surrendering to Shady and advising the jilted husband to kill his wife and her lover.) Despite the obvious levels of race-related parody in this story-based track (a fact that is hardly a secret or difficult to notice), both Eminem and Dre were lambasted in the media for the behaviour they were promoting and became seen as supporting, for instance, the use of the date rape drug and spousal murder.

Despite appearances, Eminem is quite upfront about his use of parody and play. The introductory track of *The Slim Shady LP* (he even includes an intro of this nature on *The Marshall Mathers LP)* is a tongue-in-cheek cautioning of Slim Shady's views and album content, which can be seen as a warning of what to expect on the entire album:

> [Announcer's Voice] This is a public service announcement brought to you in part by Slim Shady. The views and events expressed here are totally fucked and are not necessarily the views of anyone; however, the events and suggestions that appear on this album are not to be taken lightly. Children should not partake in the listening of this album with laces in their shoes. Slim Shady is not responsible for your actions. Upon purchasing this album, you

> have agreed not to try this at home. Anything else? [Slim Shady] Yeah. ...
> DON'T DO DRUGS.

Based on this introduction alone should we not be able to recognize the fictionalization that is inherent to *The SSLP* and thus the Slim Shady narrative? In the sense that he acknowledges how his mainstream success has somewhat affected his deviant image, through this poignant self-ridicule, Eminem resists full integration into the higher echelons of society. As Boyd (1997: 14) explains, "[t]hose who have the strongest sense of cultural authenticity have held the longest-lasting influence over the culture at large. It is the strength of this cultural authenticity, which is challenged but never fully compromised by material possessions, mainstream recognition, or personal aggrandizement."

While Eminem uses dark humour and sarcasm on most of his songs, he also portrays painful emotions. He does this best when he is rapping about the circumstances of his childhood. While Eminem does mention his father in the occasional song, most of his parental scorn is reserved for his mother, whom he has often described as a drug-addicted psychotic. At first, much of what he wrote about his mother was harmless humour. In "My Name Is," he raps "Ninety-nine percent of my life I was lied to/I just found out my mom does more dope than I do/I told her I'd grow up to be a famous rapper/Make a record about doing drugs and name it after her." On the *Marshall Mathers LP*, however his mother became the focal point of his contempt towards women. In "Criminal" he mixes parody, humour, and irony into a hilarious attack on his mother and in turn responds to many of his critics who accuse him of being immature and irresponsible:

> The mother did drugs – tar, liquor, cigarettes, and speed
> The baby came out – disfigured, ligaments indeed
> It was a seed that would grow up to be just as crazy as she
> Don't dare make fun of that baby cause that baby was me
> I'm a CRIMINAL – an animal caged who turned crazed
> But how the fuck you s'posed to grow up when you weren't raised?

Even the song "Marshall Mathers" in which Eminem ponders if fame and money are beneficial, contains an "ode" to his mom: "My fuckin' bitch mom's suing me for ten million/she must want a dollar for every pill I've been stealin'/Shit, where the fuck you think I picked up the habit/All I had to do was go in her room and lift up her mattress."

Em also takes the opposite extreme since much of the sadness on the *MMLP* is also rooted in the circumstances of his fame. One of the most emotional songs from the *MMLP* is "The Way I Am." Written and produced solely himself, Eminem presents his opinions on just about everything from his feelings about achieving unprecedented fame as a hip-hop star to the way in which he is viewed by those outside of the hip-hop community. Em gives his critics exactly what they asked for when they called upon him to step back consider his content more maturely, however, keeping true to his form, he does so with bitter irony and jabbing obscenities. First, he reflects on his content: "And since birth I've been curse with this curse just to curse/And just blurt this berserk and bizarre shit that works/And it sells and it helps in itself to relieve/all this tension dispensin' these sentences." He also explains where his anger comes from and what he thinks about the media hype that follows his career: "I am, whatever you say I am/If I wasn't, then why would I say I am?/In the paper, the news everyday I am/Radio won't even play my jam."

The verse from "The Way I Am" that I have quoted below is extensive but it interesting since Eminem has packed in a number of important issues. He defends the rights of music performers (here he defends both Marilyn Manson and Eminem) to speak their minds, refers to the Columbine incident and teen bullying, and attacks the allegations of his corrupt nature. As with the themes of many of his other songs, he re-directs blame to the parents of these children who have "gone bad" because of his shocking music. Finally, Eminem indicates that all the attention he receives will not deter him from expressing his opinions; in fact, the negativity is exactly what he needs to evoke further controversy in his rhymes:

> Sometimes I just feel like my father, I hate to be bothered
> With all of this nonsense, it's constant
> And, "Oh, it's his lyrical content —
> The song "Guilty Conscience" has gotten such rotten responses"
> And all of this controversy circles me
> And it seems like the media immediately
> Points a finger at me (finger at me)
> So I point one back at 'em, but not the index or pinkie
> Or the ring or the thumb, it's the one you put up
> When you don't give a fuck, when you won't just put up
> With the bullshit they pull, cause they full of shit too
> When a dude's gettin bullied and shoots up his school
> And they blame it on Marilyn (on Marilyn)

and the heroin
Where were the parents at? And look where it's at
Middle America, now it's a tragedy
Now it's so sad to see, an upper-class city
havin this happenin (this happenin)
then attack Eminem 'cause I rap this way (rap this way)
But I'm glad cause they feed me the fuel that I need for the fire
To burn and it's burnin and I have returned

Once again Potter's "playing of the media" comes through, both on "The Way I Am" and on the rest of the songs of *The MMLP*. However, the most noticeable difference between *The SSLP* and *The MMLP* is the way in which Eminem plays with the conventions and morals of the dominant group in society. *The MMLP* is thick with parody of everything Eminem went through after the release of *The SSLP*. This transition he experienced in between the two albums is especially evident on the aforementioned "Criminal" which Eminem begins with a "heartfelt" confession to addresses the assessment of himself and his lyrics:

A lot of people ask me ... stupid fucking questions
A lot of people think that ... what I say on records
Or what I talk about on record that I actually do in real life
Or that I believe in it
Or if I say I wanna kill somebody, that ...
I'm actually gonna do it
Or that I believe in it
Well, shit ... if you believe that then I'll kill you
You know why? 'Cause I'm a
CRIMINAL

Eminem is seen as a criminal because his "truth" is often seen as *the* truth when it is taken out of the song's context and re-interpreted by members of US society. While his deviant status is fictionalized in his lyrical narratives, he relays these stories with such conviction that they actually appear to be real. Since Eminem also combines his real and fictional biographies, he leaves it up to the listener to differentiate when and where he is playin'. As Eminem has also adopted the image of a hip-hop thug through Shady, which further pushes his work into the realm of fantasy, it becomes obvious that his use of parody and play are exactly what propel the content of his narratives. Aside from how he responds to this conflict of interpreting his narratives in his songs, Eminem also states in *Select* that "[i]f a critic calls me a bigot, misogynist pig or homophobic, I'm gonna be that. If your perception of me is fucked up, I'm gone be fucked up. If your perception of

me is that I'm a decent guy, I'm gonna show you a decent guy" ("Eminem" 2001: 44).

Eminem introduces his book *Angry Blonde* (2000) with a couple interesting phrases instructing his fans and critics on his own perceptions of his personas: "This book is made by Slim Shady, from the mind of Marshall Mathers as seen from Eminem's point of view. Got it?" While the division between the three personas is clear in his mind, as he indicates, most people do not "get it." His uses of parody and persona are often misunderstood and, as understanding these are tied into appreciating his music, the core parts of Eminem's work are misjudged. The select aspects of the hip-hop style he includes in his rhymes are often reserved for his fictional personas, which help him to address issues around race, belonging, and urban poverty. While aspects of Eminem's rap parody-style have challenged certain misplaced conceptions of hip-hop as well as hip-hop's own conceptions of itself, unlike previous white rappers who have tried what he has achieved and failed, Eminem exhibits his whiteness as an essential part of his *hip-hop* figure. Most importantly though, Em shows that "race traits," which define whites and good and blacks as bad are not as concrete as Middle Americans — the dominant group in society — assert through their condemnations of rap music and hip-hop culture.

Notes

[1] The Official Eminem Site <http://www.eminem.com>

[2] I use the term self-referencing here because Eminem takes on a number of personas that appear on his albums, Ken Kaniff and Stan, to name two characters. He also impersonates other stars, like Britney Spears, Christina Aguliera, and even former US President Bill Clinton. Eminem's use of all personas is an interesting area to explore further, but remains out of the scope of this project. For the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I will use the term "personas" to refer to Eminem's self-referencing personas.

[3] For instance, in the music video for "My Name Is" Eminem impersonates Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. During this section, "Bill Clinton" has just finished giving a speech as he walks away from then podium, "Monica Lewinsky" emerges from underneath.

[4] Gilbert's Lodge is a restaurant where Em worked before his deal.

[5] Here, Eminem is cross-referencing with the song "Guilty Conscience" from *The SSLP*, where a character named Grady, discovers that his wife has been cheating on him, shoots both her and her lover to death.

CONCLUSION

All of the negativity associated with white rappers has changed since Eminem emerged onto the mainstream and hip-hop music scenes. Now white, suburban youth have a representative who is as popular in the ghettos as he is in the suburbs. Moreover, armed with hip-hop credibility gained from his childhood experiences in the inner-city and his connection to hip-hop producer and rapper Dr. Dre, Eminem has invaded white America with catchy, bold rhymes and at the same time has disrupted the American concepts of race. Eminem, his personas, and the differing responses to them are useful for examining the ways in which race structures ideas around behavioral expectations. As the research from Crispin Sartwell, bell hooks, Robin Kelley, and numerous others indicate, the American race dichotomy is nourished by negative images of blackness, but white members of the dominant group balk immediately when those same images are superimposed over the "purity" of their whiteness.

Throughout this study, I have examined Eminem's widespread appeal in relation to the race issues provoked by such recognition. As Em's popularity is unmatched by others rappers, it is too easy to assume that his commercial success is marked and defined by his whiteness. While Shady's shrewdness and lyrical complexity are most often lost on his younger fans, music critics and members of the hip-hop nation are well aware of Eminem's skills on the mic. Presumably in response to his own experiences with his first album *Infinite* (1996), Em refuses to rely on these emcee skills alone. While he continues to manipulate the English language cleverly and consistently, he now adds in elements of differing voices and has refined emcee battling and hip-hop's use of play. Em's success is further rooted in the addition of a fictional alter ego (Slim Shady) to his personal (Marshall Mathers) and performance (Eminem) narratives that provide him numerous strong narrative backdrops through which to demonstrate his skills.

While rap music, as the most recent black threat to white morality, is growing in popularity, hip-hop culture is often blamed for the growing disrespect for societal conventions among white children. Hip-hop has always maintained high levels of popularity with white youth; however, due in part to Eminem's hip-hop success, the culture has all but exploded in the suburbs. As my accounts in Chapters 3 and 4 reveal, while the circumstances of Eminem's unprecedented fame are can be related in some part

to his white race, this same condition is what restrained his success during his underground hip-hop career. Now that he is a megastar, Em's race has taken on an added dimension. It drives his popularity among white youth as well as his notoriety among members of the dominant group.

In assuming the image of a white thug, Eminem exposes many of America's contradictions and hypocrisies and reveals a latent immorality in these same groups that admonish his fictional behaviour. While other rappers have also used the subjects and words he employs, Eminem is the first white rapper to do this with little interference or criticism from the hip-hop community. The unfortunate situation created with this kind of work is that the inflammatory nature of most of his rhymes can cause even the most liberal people to take notice. Furthermore, since he raps so quickly, it is easy to miss the elaborate switches in voice and complexity to his rhymes that he makes use of during his satirical moments. Thus, the majority of people do not (or cannot) really "hear" Eminem's rhymes and instead write him off as a social deviant who has made a fortune corrupting the minds of "innocent" children. Em, however, prospers and flourishes under this kind of disapproval. It only further proves his point (as well as that of many race theorists) that middle America becomes concerned with about inner-city issues only when they pose a threat to the dominant conventions in society.

As I write this conclusion, Eminem's third major-label album *The Eminem Show*, catapulted to the top of the Billboard charts in just one day and continues to smash its competitors. Scheduled originally for a June 4th release, Eminem's Shady/Aftermath Records label moved the date up, first to May 28th and then to May 26th (a Sunday), to combat Internet piracy and the bootlegged copies that were floating around the ghettos. With only 36 hours of sales under his belt, Eminem's new album sold 300,000 units and now stands as the first CD to debut at number one without the benefit of a full week of sales. After ten days, the album had moved an impressive 1.6 million copies (compare this with the seven days of sales for the 1.76 million units for *The Marshall Mathers LP*). After selling four million copies, the Recording Industry of America (RIAA) certified the album quadruple platinum in July.

Aside from the commercial success, the album is by far Eminem's best work. It is highly complex, more insightful, and thus a complete turn-around from his previous

work. Just as *The Marshall Mathers LP* showed us a more grown up Slim Shady compared to what we saw on *The Slim Shady LP*, on *The Eminem Show*, we see a more mature Marshall Mathers.

In Chapter 3, I quoted Neil Strauss who described Eminem's work on *The Marshall Mathers LP* as a "self-perpetuation response loop" (2001). He predicted that Eminem would use his next album for further bashing those who criticized *The Marshall Maters LP*. With *The Eminem Show*, that is hardly the case. If anything, this new album shows that Eminem is anything but predictable. He has moved beyond his usual angry anthems that attack women, homosexuals, and his critics with scathing words. Instead, he discusses the response to his personas and the mind-sets behind such responses.

While there are some instances where he is highly critical of women, these references come across as emotional scars from his personal relationships with the women in his life. As this was the kind of content that Eminem usually relayed through his Slim Shady alter ego, Shady, by extension, is practically absent from the album. Aside from "Without Me," most references to Shady are limited to the occasional critical line about Shady's effect on Marshall. The album appears less inflammatory than his previous major-label work, and it will be interesting to see what responses Eminem generates from the members of the dominant group. However, while he avoids attacking his critics in the usual manner, he also assumes what could be seen as a leftist view of the state of affairs in the US. He is quite critical of the way in which Americans have embraced the new war on terrorism wholeheartedly. On "Square Dance," Eminem's most critical political song to date, he gives an Eminem-like salute to the American response to terrorism in the US: "All this terror in America demands action/Next thing you know you got Uncle Sam's ass asking/To join their army or what you do for their Navy/You just a baby getting recruited at eighteen." Though he does mention the usual suspects — Lynne Cheney, Tipper Gore, George Bush, freedom of speech, and attempts to censor his work — most of his songs, such as the lead off track, target "White America" ("Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself, if they were brown Shady lose, Shady sits on the shelf/but Shady's cute, Shady knew Shady's dimples would help") and how perceptions that linger within the race dichotomy place him both under higher public and media scrutiny and in a position for huge success in the white, suburban teen markets.

Eminem offers a complex, multi-dimensional portrayal of white existence in an inner-city context. By depicting styles and emotions that range from open rebellion, to destructive self-hatred, and the despair tied in with poverty, Eminem takes his listeners through the journey of a white rapper's struggles to obtain and maintain credibility in hip-hop, using tightly structured narratives and skilled use of the English language. While his presence and acceptance in hip-hop have raised many questions of belonging, both within the American race dichotomy and the hip-hop community, Eminem continues to re-invent his styles and narratives in relation to the changing context around him. Furthermore, Eminem forces people to confront their latent, often racist stereotypes where black and white men are concerned. As I have demonstrated in this thesis Eminem has made significant contributions to rap music, and as such, his presence within hip-hop's tightly structured walls, cannot, and should not be seen as anything other than positive.

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