The (un)importance of authenticity in hip-hop:

why authenticity does and does not matter in hip-hop

Author: P.M.A. Kruijs

Student number: 430869

Date: 29-07-2021

Supervisor: Dr. G.H. Van Oenen

Advisor: Prof. Dr. R.B.J.M. Welten

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Contents

Introduction

The discussion of authenticity in hip-hop goes back almost as far as hip-hop itself. As soon as hip-hop left its local scene, authenticity became an issue for people in the rapidly growing scene. And to this day, claims of authenticity – or 'realness' – cannot be separated from hip-hop. Rappers constantly try to establish themselves as authentic, or even the most authentic (or the 'realest'). Fans often and continuously discuss the authenticity of the artists they love and hate. And rappers cannot help to call out each other's (lack of) authenticity in their tracks, in an attempt to seem even more authentic themselves. But what exactly are these rappers referring to when they rap about authenticity or realness? And why does it matter so much in this scene?

In this thesis, I will delve into the reasons why authenticity is so important in hip-hop, and also why it might not be as important as it is thought to be. The main reason for this research is to shed some further light on the topic of authenticity in hip-hop, as well as to amalgamate the factors that play a role in this complex subject into one body of work. By identifying the underlying reasons for the importance of authenticity in hip-hop, I aim to elucidate this sometimes confusing web of beliefs and assumptions that these authenticity claims are based upon.

I will accomplish this by first giving the reader a brief introduction to hip-hop's origins and the context in which it came to be and in which it still operates. This first chapter will be followed up by a deeper look into Rousseau's concept of authenticity, which will serve as the main philosophical background to this thesis. After this delve into Rousseau's understanding of authenticity, I will provide a number of categories within which the authenticity claims made by hip-hop artists can be placed, in order to provide some further structure and clarity to this hip-hop debate. A number of these categories will then be applied to seven prominent songs from all throughout the history of hip-hop, in order to both paint a picture of what I have been talking about, as well as to see how much of the categories discussed beforehand applies. The most prominent of these categories will then be further discussed and elucidated in the final chapter, which is where I will also introduce some further categories that explicitly apply to authenticity in hip-hop: authentic inauthenticity and inauthentic authenticity. In between these analyses, I will briefly discuss a counterargument as to why authenticity might in some cases not be as important as it is thought to be. In this way, I will have treated both reasons as to why and in what way authenticity is important in hip-hop, as well as an exception to this general importance.

Some further introductory remarks

Given how massive and varied hip-hop has gotten over these four and a half decades since its inception, there are bound to be parts of hip-hop that will not be discussed in this thesis. As much as I would have loved to go into every single part of this massive

subculture, there simply is no time or place for this, and it would have introduced a further danger of diverting too much from the main subject of this thesis. I cannot do justice to the full and rich culture and history surrounding hip-hop in a 20.000 words long thesis. I have done my best to discuss and involve the most important and relevant parts of hip-hop to some extent in this thesis.

Additionally, I do not have a clear definition of authenticity at hand in this thesis – and this is kind of the issue of the subject. If we did have a clear definition, it would be much easier to judge someone to be authentic, and there would be less of a need for a thesis such as this one. And while this thesis will be moving towards a better understanding of hip-hop authenticity, it is the nature of the subject to be unable to be summarized in a simple definition of one or two lines.

It is also not my intention to actually make any judgments about any artist's authenticity. This is because I know that my opinion is unimportant and irrelevant in something as complex as an artist's authenticity, as well as the fact that it is not the goal of this thesis. It does not matter whether or not an artist can definitely be called authentic or not. My interest lies purely in how and why they make these authenticity claims, and this is where the focus of this thesis lies.

Finally, in this thesis, I chose to use gender-neutral words wherever it made sense, when I speak of rapper(s) in general. I hope this final remark will prevent any possible confusion about this.

Chapter 1: A brief history of hip-hop

To start off the thesis, I will provide you with some key information about hip-hop. I will not go very in-depth with the history of hip-hop, but I will provide enough information to have the proper context for this thesis. In case you wish to learn more about the history of hip-hop based on what you read here, I highly recommend Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, which focuses on the history of hip-hop from its beginnings to the start of the 21st century. [1]

This chapter will start with some quick general information on what hip-hop is, and four significant phases in the history of hip-hop. These sections will then be followed up by a section on the political and cultural context of hip-hop, to prepare us for the rest of the thesis.

1.1: What is hip-hop?

Most people seem to have some idea of what hip-hop is: generally this understanding mainly involves the musical side of hip-hop. Hip-hop is a type of music that involves rapping, beats with a lot of heavy bass sounds, and explicit themes such as sex, drugs and violence. And while this is indeed true, hip-hop is much, much more than just the music. Hip-hop started off as a small subculture in the Bronx of New York, grew into a larger sub- and counterculture in the 1980's and 1990's, and as of today, it is the largest music genre and one of the largest subcultures worldwide. Hip-hop is everywhere: from the streets of New York to rural China, from the graffiti on the subways to videogames and commercial jingles. The influence of hip-hop on mainstream culture, especially on mainstream youth culture, is absolutely gigantic and immeasurable. From the clothes we wear, to the way we speak, the jokes we make; we owe much of it to hip-hop culture. Given how gigantic hip-hop and its influence is, we will have to limit our scope by quite a large degree. So let us begin with the main pillars of hip-hop, as specified by the Universal Zulu Nation, in the next section.

1.2: The pillars of hip-hop

There are five main pillars of hip-hop, which have been established by the Universal Zulu Nation (UZN).[2] The UZN itself is an international hip-hop awareness group, founded in the 1970's around the time of the start of hip-hop itself. The UZN developed under the leadership of Afrika Bambaataa,[3] in the period following a peace treaty

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[1] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation,* (London: Ebury Press, 2007), 99-101.

[2] Chang, 90.

[3] In 2016, Bambaataa was accused of molesting multiple underaged boys in the 1970's/1980's. He was never convicted for these crimes due to the statute of limitations in New York, however, he did leave his position as the leader of the UZN in that same year. The UZN also issued an apology to the victims of Bambaataa's crimes, which has led me and many others to an increased certainty of the truth to these accusations. While Bambaataa is an integral part of the history of hip-hop, I find it important to clearly state that I thoroughly disapprove of these acts

among the gangs who ran the Bronx neighborhood of New York City during the 1970's. The UZN itself, at least in its early days, also included a large amount of (former) gang members.[4] The UZN still exists as a worldwide organization to this day, and still promotes the five pillars of hip-hop, as well as related values of peace and unity. The pillars then, in no specific order, are as follows:

- DJing: short for disc-jockeying. This is the basis of hip-hop, as the DJing of R&B and funk records, alongside other genres, has led to the creation of hip-hop. DJing is the mixing of (parts of) different songs on a turntable, taking and leaving parts of multiple songs at a time. While hip-hop did not create DJing, it did create a new twist on the art: hip-hop DJ's strongly focused on breaks. Breaks are the moments in a song where the beat is stripped down to just the drums: this part proved to be exceptionally danceable for so-called break-dancers. DJ Kool Herc, one of the founding fathers of hip-hop, has invented this form of DJing.[5] He went on to single out the breaks on songs, and continuously play breaks during his DJ-sets for the audience to dance to.

The practice of DJing has gradually evolved into the art of sampling done by hip-hop producers, which takes DJing a step further, by getting rid of the turntable in favor of more flexible recording hard- and software. Sampling is the incorporation of parts of other songs into a new songs: in this way, it is much akin to DJing. Alongside the hip-hop DJ's, we find the MC:

- Emceeing (or MCing): MC being short for Master of Ceremony. The purpose of the MC originally was to enthuse the DJ's audience to dance along with the music and get involved. As hip-hop evolved, so did the role of the MC, which has given us the rapper as we know them today. While initially it was the DJ, nowadays the rapper is the face of hip-hop. When we think of hip-hop, we think of big names of hip-hop's old school, like Tupac and A Tribe Called Quest, as well as big names of more recent times, like Kendrick Lamar and Drake, all of whom are MC's.

- Graffiti: another major form of expression for members of the hip-hop community.[6] While graffiti is an ancient art, it made its return in the Bronx in the 1970's, resulting in the practice of tagging. Tagging is the labeling of places or objects in the public space with the graffiti artist's 'tag,' usually done with either spray paint or special graffiti markers. A tag is somewhat like a signature, it is always meant to look the same, and it is quick and easy to write. Tagging was done both by individuals, as well as by gangs, to tag locations and neighborhoods controlled by a certain gang. This practice is, in most cases and places, illegal. As the practice evolved, graffiti artists started to create more artistic illustrations rather than simple tags. Given the connection between hip-hop and its evolution from (the remnants of) gangs, as well as the location of the

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he has likely committed, and that I will only mention his name in these moments where it is impossible to ignore the role he has played in the history of hip-hop.
[4] Chang, 44.
[5] Chang, 78-79.
[6] Chang, 73-75.

Bronx, graffiti and hip-hop were and still are intrinsically connected. Additionally, hip-hop producers often add a 'producer tag,' which is often times a certain recording of their name, or a phrase associated with them, to the start of any song they produce. These producer tags are rooted in graffiti culture.

- Breakdancing: a particular form of dance which grew from hip-hop DJing, with the dancers showing off their moves during the breaks in the songs. Given the importance of breakdancing to the evolution of DJing into hip-hop production, the importance of this element cannot be understated.

- Knowledge: the last and perhaps most important pillar of hip-hop. This involves knowledge of the history and origins of hip-hop itself, knowledge of literature, science, religion, politics, and so on. This pillar also includes street knowledge: the knowledge that comes from living on the streets of marginalized neighborhoods. Hip-hop started in a marginalized neighborhood, the Bronx, and a large part of the hip-hop community comes from similar neighborhoods. The importance of this knowledge is not just in having it: hip-hop music is a great means to spread this knowledge as well. Hip-hop music has historically been a great tool to inform the community, and later on the mainstream, on political issues and the struggles of marginalized people. Knowledge in this way is an important part of the lives of many members of the hip-hop community.

1.3: A brief hip-hop history
Phase 1: The beginnings on Sedgewick Avenue   1973-1979
In 1973, DJ Kool Herc held the first hip-hop party on Sedgewick Avenue in the Bronx, NYC, introducing breaks into his DJ-sets.[7] Throughout these first years, the main pillars of hip-hop as we know them were established by the UZN. Hip-hop was still a local phenomenon, centered in and around the Bronx neighborhood of New York City. DJ's were the main focus of hip-hop music, with the main function of the MC still being to get the crowd to move along with the DJ's music.

Phase 2: The involvement of record labels and the move to the radio   1979-1985
The first major change in hip-hop came with its first major hit-song: *Rapper's Delight* by the Sugarhill Gang in 1979. *Rapper's Delight* meant the quick, almost immediate move of hip-hop from the local level all the way to the global level. And with its first hit came the first major changes within the hip-hop community as well. This hit by the Sugarhill Gang introduced three major changes: first off, the three MC's were not local to the Bronx, they came from Englewood, New Jersey. Hip-hop was completely located within the Bronx up until this point, but with these three MC's, this ceased to be the case. This triggered a first question with regard to authenticity in hip-hop: does

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[7] Chang, 67-70.

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it matter where a hip-hop artist comes from? How could these MC's, who weren't even from the Bronx in the first place, take the hip-hop sound like this, and bring it to the mainstream?

Second, Sugarhill gang was a group composed of three MC's, notably lacking a DJ. Up until this point, the DJ had been the main focus of any hip-hop act, but this new group had changed up this dynamic. This signals the shift from DJ-centric hip-hop acts, to MC-centric hip-hop acts. DJ's seem to flourish in the live aspect of hip-hop, while MC's work very well on records. Much later on, it seems like producers have largely taken over this role of DJ's in hip-hop, though DJ's have of course not left the hip-hop landscape.

Third, *Rapper's Delight* signified the first real step of hip-hop out of the local level, into the (inter)national level, as *Rapper's Delight* had become a worldwide hit. With a scene that was extremely local up until this point, this was a drastic change of scenery for hip-hoppers. Radio play also meant that record labels started to get involved with hip-hop music from this point onwards, and groups that were already established in the local scene started to get involved with record labels too.

An additional issue that started with *Rapper's Delight* comes with a small anecdote from old school MC Grandmaster Caz. Big Bank Hank from the Sugarhill Gang was still a pizza delivery guy at the time he talked with Grandmaster Caz. Hank told Caz that he had had some conversations with a record label executive, and that she told him she liked his voice and wanted him to record a rap song. Hank however, had no experience with writing rhymes, unlike Caz. So he asked Caz for some rhymes, assuming that the conversation with the label executive Sylvia Robinson wouldn't go anywhere anyway. But history showed that this could not have been any less true. Big Bank Hank went on to make a hit with the rest of the Sugarhill Gang, using Grandmaster Caz's lyrics in parts of the song. Of course, Grandmaster Caz was and unfortunately still is upset about the incident, and to add insult to injury Hank never made it right with Caz publicly.[8] This brings us to another question: how important is writing your own rhymes for an MC? Or, how does originality factor into authenticity for a hip-hop artist? Rappers care a lot about the lyrics they use, and the wordplay they show off, and lyrics are arguably the most important part of any hip-hop song. How will this factor into authenticity? We will return to this later.

Phase 3: The rise of gangsta rap   mid-80's-90's
I will not go into great detail about the developments between the release of *Rapper's Delight* in 1979 and the start of gangsta rap in the mid-80's, other than that hip-hop had

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[8] Geoff Edgers. "They took Grandmaster Caz's rhymes without giving him credit. Now, he's getting revenge." Washington Post, (2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/they-took-grandmaster-cazs-rhymes-without-giving-him-credit-now-hes-getting-revenge/2016/09/29/f519c35a-7f3e-11e6-8d0c-fb6c00c90481_story.html.

rapidly increased in popularity in these six years. So what does gangsta rap signify in the history of hip-hop, especially in regards to authenticity? And what is gangsta rap in the first place?

Gangsta rap is a subgenre of hip-hop, focusing on, as the name implies, the life of gang members, or 'gangsters.' Hip-hop had been generally positive music, so the use of hip-hop to convey such violent stories as that of Ice-T's *6'N The Morning* and N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* was quite a radical shift from what had been a core element of hip-hop up until that point. And this controversy was not just restricted to the hip-hop community: with the rising popularity of hip-hop, parents in the United States started fussing about the violent content of these raps as well, calling for censorship, which to some extent did happen temporarily.[9] Similar discussions still pop up in mainstream media from time to time, as for example happened in the Netherlands with drill rap in 2020, and a few years earlier in the United Kingdom for the same type of rap.

Gangsta rap thus signified another break within hip-hop, and in extension, within the broader Black music tradition. Gangsta rappers left behind the uplifting effects of hip-hop before them, to make place for violent, but still politically empowering, lyrics. This leads us to another question: what role does tradition play in hip-hop? How does tradition factor into authenticity for a hip-hop artist?

Gangsta rap evolved throughout the years, just as the rest of hip-hop did. Of course, the intention of an artist operating in a certain (sub)genre differs from artist to artist, but in general, the point of gangsta rap can be seen as trying to bring attention to the state of life in marginalized neighborhoods in the United States. By telling a story that many people with a similar background can relate to, and by broadcasting this story to an audience outside of this background, these artists have been able to bring attention to their situation in order to call for reforms. Gangsta rap has evolved from a very controversial subgenre to a significant political tool for marginalized artists throughout the world.

Phase 4: Where are we at now?   90's-now

From gangsta rap on, hip-hop has continued to grow exponentially to the point where it has become the biggest genre in the world as of 2021. And with a small subculture growing into the world's biggest music genre comes a lot of changes, both in form and content. Where gangsta rap introduced an aspect of explicit violence in hip-hop, dirty rap introduced sex into hip-hop lyrics in a major way. The most prominent group in the starting days of dirty rap is the 2 Live Crew, who scored their first major worldwide hit with *Me So Horny*. The prominence of this group has created space for new artists

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[9] Chang, 347-350.

to make explicit rap music, and these subjects of sex and violence have become commonplace in popular rap these days.

A third major topic that has grown to prominence, alongside sex and violence, is drugs. While drugs has been a subject for rappers for decades, there has been an important shift in the way drugs are rapped about. While it was commonplace for rappers in the 90's to rap about selling drugs in their songs, nowadays the focus seems to have shifted from drug dealing to drug use. Trap music, with trap referring to a 'traphouse' in which drugs are made, has become one of the biggest subgenres of hip-hop at this point, popularized by artists such as Juicy J and Gucci Mane, and nowadays represented by major names such as Travis Scott and Future.

The reason for mentioning these three subjects, violence, sex and drugs, stems from the origins of hip-hop and its role, namely that of enlightening and empowering the listeners. While there are still prominent rappers who make hip-hop with subject matter closer to that of old school rappers, it is interesting and important to note this shift in content. Because alongside the increase of hip-hop about more 'recreational' subjects such as the major three I mentioned, the role of commerce has increased too. While artists such as Kendrick Lamar and J Cole who mostly rap in the conscious tradition of hip-hop[10] appeal to the more hardcore hip-hop fans, newer artists such as Travis Scott and Future, with their focus generally being on drugs and sex, appeal to a much wider, non-hip-hop crowd. While it is hard to say what an artist's intentions are with their music unless they themselves mention it explicitly, it is clear to see how well hip-hop on such subjects generally sells as compared to conscious rap, which brings us to another question, on the intentions of hip-hop artists: is there hip-hop that is made explicitly to be used for commerce (aka commercial rap), and if so, is this a problem? This subject of commercial rap will return later on, just as the other aforementioned subjects.

1.4: The context of hip-hop

Part of any inquiry into a subject that spans a major subculture, is understanding the context in which the subculture operates. This section will thus be dedicated to a brief overview of the contexts in which hip-hop operates, which are all strongly interconnected.

1.4.1: African American culture and politics

As we know, hip-hop originated in the Bronx, and the Bronx is a majority Latin and African American neighborhood in New York City. Hip-hop also comes from the Black music tradition, but more on that in the next section. Naturally, from the very

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[10] Conscious rap is rap focused on mostly political topics that affect the artists and their audience. It is an important medium for criticism, as well as to spread knowledge to one's listeners. The message of the song, rather than its commercial appeal, is what is most important in conscious rap.

beginning, hip-hop has been a majority Black and Latin American subculture, though the emphasis is usually laid on the Black side. This is due to the fact that hip-hop itself is a continuation of the Black music tradition, as well as the fact that the majority of the hip-hop community has always been Black. While the role of Latin Americans in hip-hop is very significant, I will have to limit my scope to the African American side of the story.

The Bronx was in utter disarray around the time hip-hop came to be. While the majority of New York City was getting developed and invested into, the Bronx was getting demolished to make these developments in the rest of New York City possible. At the time, the plans to develop Manhattan into the dominating business district that it is today were getting started. And one part of this plan for the further development of Manhattan, was to create a massive highway from the suburbs of New Jersey to the heart of Manhattan.[11] In order to build this Cross-Bronx Expressway, major parts of the Bronx neighborhood were demolished. The minorities who occupied these soon to be demolished houses were barely given compensation for their houses, giving them nowhere to go, while the richer white families who used to live in the Bronx could move elsewhere with much greater ease. This left the Bronx in a state of chaos and rubble, which got exponentially worse when the apartment building owners who were still left in the Bronx found out that it was more profitable for them to have their buildings burned down for insurance money, than to have people stay in them and pay rent. This led to an epidemic of burning buildings in the Bronx, adding to the misery and poverty in the area.[12] This state of poverty, unemployment and abandonment created the conditions in which hip-hop came into existence.

And it was not just the extreme poverty that was weighing on these pioneers' backs: this was the 1970's, only a handful of years after the enactment of the civil rights legislation in the USA in 1964. African Americans were still treated far worse than white Americans, dealing with discrimination wherever they went or were. Discrimination by being forgotten or actively thwarted by government programs, discrimination by white people who looked down upon them: discrimination in every part of their existence. This major issue persists to this day. This is where the direct connection between hip-hop and Black liberation movements becomes evident.

1.4.2: The Black music tradition
Hip-hop stands in the larger history of the African American music tradition, which in turn resulted from the Black music tradition. While it is impossible to truly do justice to a tradition this large and rich, I will attempt to briefly note some of the most important points of this tradition for our inquiry into authenticity in hip-hop. In

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[11] Chang, 11.
[12] Chang, 13.

Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy, William C Banfield writes about the way in which the African American music tradition started. [13] Music has always been a very important and integral part of the lives of (West-)African peoples, and even through the horrible slave trade of the people of West-Africa from the 17th century onwards, music remained a central and important expression for the West-Africans who had now become enslaved African Americans.[14] Central to this Black music tradition is the griot (or jali), a traditional musician who can be understood as the musical keepers of tradition and history. Griots were generally held in high esteem in West-African societies, and continued to be among the enslaved West-Africans in North America.

From this larger Black musical tradition, the African American music tradition came to be. The start of the African American music tradition is to be found in the form of spirituals sang by enslaved people, which in turn has led to blues, jazz, ragtime, gospel, swing, bebop, r&b, rock and roll, soul, pop, and eventually, hip-hop.[15] These genres have all proved to be of major cultural and musical importance in the Western world. Importantly, Banfield describes the main elements of African American music, which have their roots in the West-African musical tradition. These elements are as follows:

1. The music is communally based.
2. The music reflects collective and individual improvisation.
3. The music is spirit led.
4. The music exhibits rhythmic dynamism.
5. The music features the sound of the Black voice or uses the horn as an extension of the Black voice.
6. The music includes social commentary and employs inexhaustible variations of repetition and metric layering, which includes guttural expression (moans, groans, screams, shrills) as beautiful.
7. The music encourages active listener participation and reaction.
8. The [musical] expressions incorporate physical movement as part of the performance practice.[16]

All of these elements have persisted in hip-hop to some extent, the most important of which probably being six and seven. Social commentary has always been an important part of hip-hop, and the guttural expressions Banfield describes have become more and more prominent over the last two decades in hip-hop, in the form of 'adlibs.'

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[13] William Banfield. *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy*, (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2010).
[14] Banfield, 94.
[15] Banfield, 95.
[16] Banfield, 95.

Adlibs in hip-hop are exclamations of words, phrases or sounds throughout a song, sometimes for emphasis of lyrics, other times just as an addition to the song.

Given these elements Banfield described, and the similarity in the role other forms of Black music fulfill and the role hip-hop fulfills, we can firmly place hip-hop in the larger tradition of Black music.

1.5: The introduction of authenticity into hip-hop

Now that we have the five pillars of hip-hop, a brief description of the major phases hip-hop has gone through, as well as a grasp of the context in which hip-hop operates, we can move on to the start of our inquiry: what is it that lead to the question of authenticity in hip-hop?

Before 1979, when *Rapper's Delight* came out, hip-hop was still extremely local, restricted to only the Bronx. The fact that the Sugarhill Gang, who made this record, were not from the Bronx, as well as the fact that *Rapper's Delight* causes hip-hop to go from local to international in the blink of an eye, caused a radical shift in meaning for hip-hop as we have seen. With people from outside of the Bronx now also making hip-hop music, and with hip-hop now reaching outside of the Bronx into corners of the world unimaginable at the start, it was not as clear anymore what was and what was not hip-hop. Before this shift, people who attended the DJ's hip-hop parties in the Bronx, the DJ's and their MC's, were all part of hip-hop by default. This status of being part of it by default, inferred a certain 'authenticity by default' onto these people. By authenticity by default, I mean a type of unnoticed authenticity, the authenticity that is not really authenticity yet, since authenticity only really becomes something when it is questioned and dynamic. And this nature of authenticity makes it so that authenticity did become an issue exactly when hip-hop expanded past the Bronx, into the world.

This expansion created an in-group and an out-group for hip-hop. Some people were assumed to be part of hip-hop since they had always been a part of hip-hop, or since they came from the Bronx. Other people from outside of the Bronx were not part of this in-group, and thus needed to meet other requirements to become part of this in-group. Being part of the in-group then infers a form of authenticity onto the person. But in reality, it is much more complex than this. Because how do we decide who belongs where? And who would decide this in the first place? Who is authentic and who is not? Who is part of hip-hop and who is not? How could we know? And more importantly: why do people care whether they are seen as authentic or not in hip-hop?

With these questions in mind, as well as the broader context given in this chapter, we will delve deeper into the topic at hand in this thesis. But not before we broaden our philosophical understanding of authenticity, with the help of Marshall Berman.

Chapter 2: Philosophical understandings of authenticity

Most of this section's description of Rousseauvian authenticity philosophy will be derived from Marshall Berman's book *The Politics of Authenticity*.[17] While Rousseau was not the first to write on the problematic nature of authenticity, he was the among the first Western philosophers to emphasize the urgency of the problematic nature of authenticity, and in extension of the problem of the self.[18] To understand his problematization of authenticity, how it came to be and why it is a problem, we will need to have a proper understanding of three core subjects, which are as follows: the self, authenticity and its connection to the self, and the reason why the problems of authenticity are located in modernity. These three subjects will therefore be discussed at length in this chapter. After this, a connection will be started between Rousseauvian philosophy of authenticity and authenticity in hip-hop.

2.1 What is the self?

Rousseau's understanding of the self was developed in modernity. More specifically, Rousseau mostly wrote on the self in the modern society of Paris. In pre-modern societies, men were generally born into the roles they would assume as they grew up. A carpenter's son would become a carpenter, a blacksmith's son a blacksmith, and so on. For women this was even more straightforward, as they were not expected to do or become much outside of their traditional role of housewife, with some exceptions for the nobility. But with the development into a modern society, these traditional expectations became unstable, and subject to change. As it used to be expected of men to simply continue on the professions of their fathers, modernity allowed men to find their own identity. But while the foundations of these static pre-modern identities became unstable, this by no means meant that every man could and would suddenly start to create or choose their own new-found identity. Modern society, just like pre-modern society, was still very much governed by the social roles that placed men in the same roles as their fathers. More importantly, these same social roles maintained the workings of the hierarchical class system of society, with royalty at the top, and the peasantry all the way at the bottom.

Before we can get to the self, we will have to delve a little bit deeper into what identity is. For Rousseau, the self is what underlies, or could underlie, one's identity. *Could underlie*, because Berman here introduces a distinction originally made by Ralph Linton, between two types of identity: ascribed and achieved identity.[19] Ascribed identity is the generally pre-modern form of identity, the identity one is ascribed from birth by being born as the son of a carpenter, a blacksmith, and so on. The son's

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[17] Marshall Berman. *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*. (London: Verso, 2009).
[18] Berman, 75.
[19] Berman, 114.

ascribed identity would simply correspond to the profession they would have later on in life. Achieved identity, on the other hand, is not ascribed from birth, but is "left open to be fulfilled through competition and individual effort."[20] [21]

Berman uses the word self-identity when referring the type of identity that is based on your self, rather than on societal expectations of your social role. And this connection with your self is the basis upon which to build your claims of authenticity. But what exactly the self is remains ambiguous. For Rousseau, finding one's self is a slow, conscious, forming process. The self is something that is separate from others and from other things. The self is also divided within itself. The inner self of man is essentially hidden from others, but also from the person themselves, masked by a sort of veil. This hiding must be overcome, and the self must be uncovered and formed, in order to be considered authentic in a Rousseauvian sense.[22]

Ambiguous as it may be, Rousseau's understanding of the self entails that the self is separate from others, (initially) hidden from both the subject and from others, and that it is divided between an inward and an outward expression. And while it may sound like this is an ambiguity that will be overcome, it is inherent to authenticity to be ambiguous, so this ambiguity is here to stay.

2.2 What is authenticity according to Rousseau, and how does it relate to the self?
As we learned in the previous section, one's authenticity is explicitly related to one's self, and therefore dependent on one's self. If we return to Linton's two-fold understanding of identity, we can see authenticity as related to one's achieved identity. A person cannot be authentic if their identity is ascribed, since an ascribed identity is not based on the self. One's identity has to be achieved, through a conscious process of meditation and research of the self, in order for one's identity to be able to be authentic, according to Rousseau. While in a pre-modern society it was nigh impossible for a person to be authentic, it became a possibility in modern society, due to this shift from ascribed identity to achieved identity. Since achieved identities have become a possibility, it has become possible to form or find your own authenticity based on your self, rather than on expectations of others of how you are supposed to be. And with this move to an identity that can be shaped and found in the self, rather than given by virtue of one's position in society, identity loses its static nature. Identity and the self become dynamic rather than static at this point, and it is at this very point, that authenticity comes into question.

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[20] Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man* (1936), quoted in Marshall Berman. *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*. (London: Verso, 2009), 115.
[21] Women are notably absent in this description: this is because at the time, women in Western society were still very much stuck in their traditional roles. While middle and higher class men gained the ability to reflect on and achieve their own identity, women were still far left behind in this regard.
[22] Berman, 79-80.

But even after finding or forming one's self through a conscious search for it, one is not guaranteed to be authentic, and this process of the search for and formation of the self is never finished. Looking past the dynamic character of the self and of one's identity, there is also the matter of being your self, and acting like your self around others. For a person to be authentic, they have to be decisive and they have to act according to their self. They have to be "at one with themselves," and thus not diminish or repress parts of their self. This is where an aspect of truth comes into play. Hiding the truth by acting different from your self, implies that you are being untruthful. And the importance of truth in authenticity, perhaps even more so in hip-hop, cannot be understated. Additionally, Berman suggests that Rousseau might have been talking about being true about your sexuality as well, which leads us to next aspect of authenticity for Rousseau: the role of the romantic partner. [23]

Here we come across what seems to be a paradox at first sight: we learned that one's self is demarcated from others, but now we learn that Rousseau also said that only a man and a woman together united by romantic love, could hope to become a complete moral person. In a way, one's romantic partner is part of one's self, at least to the extent that they shape your self to some extent. And while it may seem contradictory to have to look outside of one's self to try to find one's self, sexuality as well as other parts of the self necessarily involve others. This introduction of others into authenticity will prove to be very important.

Finally, the authentic person must be independent from others, though not from their romantic partner, and lack possessions in order to remain independent. The authentic man then was, necessarily, an 'amiable foreigner:' not really part of a society, but still taking a place related to a society.[24] This is to remain unaffected by the expectations and pressures that come with living within a society, since these can and do shape a person. The lack of possessions explicitly relates to the role of material desires in a market society, to which we will return quickly.

Authenticity for Rousseau thus consists of four parts: the search for one's self, acting in accordance with one's self, independence, and the role of others (or the romantic partner). And all of this is located in modernity, as it is the era in which authenticity and the self became an issue to be discussed. And without this discussion and acknowledgement of authenticity, there would be no authenticity. Before modern society, even before pre-modern society or any form of society as we know it, natural man was 'authentic by default' since he simply lived within himself, according to his self.[25] It is the unnatural situation of the society that caused man to become alienated from their selves. This idea of the natural man is what Rousseau wanted to return to in a way, though slightly modified, since societies had changed life so radically that a

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[23] Berman, 189.
[24] Berman, 188.
[25] Berman, 145.

return to life like that of the natural pre-societal man had become impossible. So how did he propose to do this? Before we can get to this, we will need to grasp why this self-alienation is specifically related to modernity.

2.3 Self-alienation and the role of the market

To understand why the problematization of the self is a modern phenomenon, we will start by returning to the earlier distinction we saw between ascribed and achieved identities. The ascribed identity is endowed upon a person by the situation they are born into, as we know from Linton.[26] It is a form of identity that does not stray far from very basic roles, such as one's profession. As this was simply what one was born as or into, and as life as a worker was very time-consuming and tiring, there was barely any time to even consider reflecting upon what one's authentic identity would be, or could be. But more importantly, even if they did have the time, the realization of the topic of authenticity had not even appeared yet. As we also know at this point, in modern times, a shift took place in which people could have an achieved identity rather than an ascribed identity. This shift was most clearly shown in the Parisian society which Rousseau primarily discusses in his works.

But the fact that there was a possibility of an achieved identity in the modern Parisian society at this point in time, did not mean that most free men would then be(come) authentic.[27] Rousseau's demur is best understood when we introduce the concept of self-alienation. The self-alienation of man in traditional society is relatively straightforward: man was born into a profession, this profession would make up his identity, and that is all. There was no time or place for a man to reflect on their self, and therefore they remained, whether alienated or not, stuck in an ascribed identity. But self-alienation in a society in which one *could* become one's authentic self requires some more explanation, as man had gained the possibility to grow aware of their own self-alienation.

Rousseau often spoke of 'natural man:' man before any form of society. This pre-societal man was authentic by default, and not alienated from his self, according to Rousseau.[28] Authentic *by default* implies that there was no issue of authenticity yet, so there was no mention of authenticity at this point. Authenticity therefore might not be the most suitable word, but it is the word that makes the most sense in this context. The alienation of a man from his self only became possible in a society, Rousseau claimed. So what is it in society that drives this self-alienation? The culprit here seems to be the market and its workings, and how the market drives competition among men, resulting in and driven by inequality.[29]

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[26] Berman, 114.
[27] Berman, 115.
[28] Berman, 145.
[29] Berman, 136-139.

Rousseau's idea of the self and of authenticity are rooted in an idea of having and satisfying one's internal needs, or acting according to one's inner self. This is rooted in his concept of *amour de soi*, which basically is self-love that is only related to the self, with the ultimate goal of self-preservation.[30] Amour de soi is juxtaposed with *amour propre*, which is a type of relation to the self that requires approval of others, and thus exists only in relation to others. It is largely driven by a sense of competition, which comes to be in a market society.

Now, in a society in which the market decides the life of its inhabitants in a major way, people are forced to compete with others for property. Forced seems like a very strong way to put it, and one might think: what would withhold a person from, instead of competing in the market for property (amour propre), focusing on fulfilling their internal needs(amour de soi)? This Rousseau explains by stating that inequality and the misery and lack of property endured by lower-class citizens is the biggest reason why rich people enjoy their property.[31] Not actively competing in such a society would therefore leave one vulnerable to become exploited or robbed of their property. Inequality is then the key reason for pursuing wealth and property, for both the upper and lower classes of society. And this is not something one can simply avoid, because, according to Rousseau, if even one man chooses to seek property, all men are forced to seek property, otherwise they will run the risk of being exploited and excluded.[32] Living in a market society thus forces one to participate in this market society. And participating in such a society necessarily involves taking into account the role and influence of others on your own life, and in extension, on your own self.

Given that modern society is a market society, man will be constantly competing, whether they want to or not, and therefore, man will be constantly comparing himself to others. The market and this type of society instills needs in man that will never be able to be fulfilled, given the nature of a market society.[33] Thus, amour propre is more important than amour de soi in this type of society. And amour propre and this way of living creates discontent, since the needs of a man living such a life can never be fully fulfilled. This leaves man in modern society essentially stuck in a vicious cycle of competition and comparison, which leaves little space for amour de soi, and thus no space for a development of the self on which authenticity can be based. In this way, even though man gained the tools to essentially become free from traditional roles and ascribed identities in modern society, it was this very modern society that put man back into the chains of competition and constant comparison, returning him to this state of self-alienation.

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[30] Berman, 147.
[31] Berman, 138.
[32] Berman, 134.
[33] Berman, 156.

2.4 The necessity of authenticity's ambiguity

The struggle between wanting to be fully authentic but at the same time knowing that it is not possible to become fully authentic, has been the common thread throughout this chapter so far. But we should look past this struggle, and come to understand that this struggle is simply a part of authenticity. Actually, it is more than just a part of this struggle: authenticity would not exist if it were not for this struggle. So instead of trying to resist or avoid this struggle, it might make more sense to accept the struggle and to work with it. This means accepting that in order to speak of and know of authenticity, one has to accept that the more you speak of it, the less attainable authenticity becomes. And when authenticity was not yet a subject in this way, it was more attainable, but remained invisible and unknown, and therefore it also remained unattainable. It seems that the more one tries to be or know about authenticity, and the more one is aware of their own (lack of) authenticity, resulting in less authenticity. There is a need for a certain lack of effort in other to be authentic, and this becomes increasingly more difficult in situations and communities in which there is a strong emphasis on your authenticity, such as the hip-hop community.

2.5: How do we relate Rousseauvian authenticity to hip-hop?

In Julius Bailey's *Philosophy and Hip-Hop*, we can find a section dedicated to the juxtaposition of 'commercial rap' and 'conscious rap.'[34] We can understand these two variations of rap as follows: conscious rap is rap with a specific political message that the rapper means to convey to their listeners. This is one of the main goals of the music these rappers make. For commercial rap however, the message that had been so prominent in hip-hop from the start has been obscured to the background. Commercial rap is understood to have been made to appeal to the masses, with the goal of financial success becoming more important than that of spreading a message through the music. It is important to note though, that commercial rap is a very contentious term. Generally, no artist seems to identify as a commercial artist, likely because commercial rap is generally looked down upon within the hip-hop community. This also makes it much harder for anyone to judge certain music or people to be commercial in hip-hop.

As we have learned in chapter one, a key part of early rap has been the message the artist wants to convey to their listeners. And as we also know by now, authenticity was not really called into question around the time where conscious rap was still the main way of rapping. This is very reminiscent of Rousseau's pre-societal natural man. When hip-hop germinated from its local scene into the global sphere, the role of commerce and capitalist interests exploded within the scene, just like the market has in society. Bailey shows this opposition between conscious and commercial rap

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[34] Julius Bailey, *Philosophy and Hip-Hop: Ruminations on Postmodern Cultural Form*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

beautifully by referring to the content of these raps. While money has always been an important subject in rap lyrics, the focus seems to have shifted from one on acquiring money in conscious rap, to that of simply having money in commercial rap, as Bailey remarked.[35] This focus on money in general makes sense given the fact that a significant part of the hip-hop community comes from impoverished neighborhoods. When financial security isn't a given, the acquisition of money becomes an even bigger part of one's life, thus it makes sense to rap about this too. Listeners can relate to this. But on the opposite end, the focus on having (ludicrous amounts of) money, is not an experience a lot of the hip-hop community, or people in general, can relate to. It does however speak to a shared fantasy of riches held by lots of people, especially those who come from poverty.

Commercial rap in Bailey's definition is also largely more accessible for people outside of the hip-hop community, since the shared experience of the hardships of financial insecurity and of being a minority in a largely white society is not something the majority of the population can relate to, while the fantasy of becoming very rich is a much more commonly shared feeling. Add on the fact that commercial rap has a large focus on catchy beats and collaborations with big (pop)stars, and it becomes easy to understand that commercial rap has grown exponentially through the decades.

The picture drawn in this section is very basic still. It is based on the assumption of an easy and clear distinction between commercial and conscious rap, which in practice often turns out to be much more of a grey area. Another assumption, or rather implication, present in the previous section, is that conscious hip-hop is generally considered to be authentic, and commercial rap inauthentic. But here too, the distinction and relations are not as clearly demarcated in practice as they are in theory. Because what do we even base authenticity on in the first place? What would make a conscious rapper authentic? Is it in the connection between their subject matter and their own life? Is it in the sincerity of the message they put out? If it is to be found in the former, then a commercial rapper could just as easily be authentic, if they do really live the (e.g.) lavish life they rap about. The subject matter may be a bit bland then, but it would not be less authentic for that reason. The ambiguity found in Rousseau's understanding of authenticity has only increased when applied to hip-hop. It is clear that we need to delve deeper into a hip-hop version of an understanding of authenticity, and it is time to lay some groundwork for this on the hip-hop side of the story, in the next chapter.

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[35] Bailey, 61.

Chapter 3: The main categories and levels for authenticity claims in hip-hop

In this chapter, I will go over the works of three writers and their categorical work for the analysis of authenticity claims in hip-hop. I will start with Larsson's levels to authenticity, then turn to McLeod's six dimensions of hip-hop authenticity claims, to finish off with Cutler's linguistic analysis of authenticity claims in hip-hop. These categories and levels will then be applied to the analyses following in chapters four and five.

3.1 What levels are there to authenticity?

In Susan Larsson's article 'I bang my head therefore I am: Constructing individual and social authenticity in the heavy metal subculture,'[36] she distinguishes three levels to authenticity, which, as we will see, neatly apply to hip-hop as well. These three are the individual level, the collective level, and the level of the collective against society. The first of these three, the individual level, applies to one's sense of self, and how one chooses to express this.[37] Often times, this level invokes one's history with the subculture, as well as one's love of the subculture. Larsson interviewed a number of people involved in the heavy metal scene in Sweden, and the quotes she has provided from her interview show the metalheads invoking an element of authority, which they base on the length of time they have been involved with the subculture. A number of people mention having been involved with the scene for a long time, often times since childhood, despite facing rejection and judgment from outsiders due to their heavy metal style. Their individual authenticity as metalheads seems to be mostly based on the length of time they have been involved with the subculture, and the fact that a significant amount of these people have met with difficulties because of their involvement with the subculture. They invoke elements of resilience and longevity for this.

It is quite easy to extend this to hip-hop as well: claims of authenticity based on the length of time one has been involved with the subculture are plentiful. This seems to happen in two ways: which are both displayed in rappers boasting their knowledge of hip-hop. This display of knowledge showcases both your longevity in hip-hop, and your dedication to hip-hop, since such knowledge implies a long and serious involvement with hip-hop. A rapper can then make an appeal to their own authenticity by emphasizing the fact that they were involved with hip-hop for a long time, usually starting in their childhood. Another aspect we found in Larsson's text was that of having to face adversity and disapproval due to one's involvement with the

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[36] Susanna Larsson, "I bang my head therefore I am: Constructing Individual and Social Authenticity in the Heavy Metal Subculture." *Young* 21, 1 (2013), 95-110.

[37] Larsson, 99-102

subculture. Being a rapper is still often met with disapproval and difficulty in Western society, especially for Black people. Having to face these issues and coming out on top of them seems to be an important sign of strength and love for the subculture, as well as a sign of a strong sense of self. Staying involved and dedicated despite facing these hurdles shows your resilience as a hip-hopper.

The second level Larsson distinguishes, that of the collective, forgoes the construction of an authentic self within and especially outside of the subculture. Being a metalhead, interviewee Erik said, is a package deal: "It's one of those things about metal … you buy the package, it's this thing where you buy the records, you dress like a metal fan, you listen to heavy metal, you go to concerts, you drink beer and you have fun. It's not like you only put on a Motörhead t-shirt on Saturdays."[38] While the discussion among interviewees contests this a bit and loosens these conditions, Erik does seem to have explained the essence of collective authenticity in a subculture quite concisely. Involvement with a subculture is more than just consuming the fun parts: it is a wider experience and a responsibility. It is a way of life. As a metalhead, you represent the subculture outside of the heavy metal community. If you only wear your Motörhead t-shirt on Saturdays, you dilute the subcultural foundations of heavy metal. The subcultural part of heavy metal, and the same goes for hip-hop, shows a resistance and protest against the dominant culture in the society you live in. There is a need for a dedication to this cause, which apparently does play a role in whether a person can be judged to be authentic. Thus, while you carry out this part of the heavy metal identity by yourself, it keeps you connected to a collective identity and authenticity as part of the heavy metal subculture.

Extending this second level of authenticity to hip-hop: just like metalheads, hip-hoppers are often times outwardly recognizable. Not every hip-hopper is of course recognizable as a hip-hopper, but there is a certain style connected to the music, a style that changes through time and location. A significant amount of members of the hip-hop community dress in streetwear, which generally heavily involves sneakers and a casual, though fashionable style.[39] Of course, since hip-hop has grown massively popular, so have the styles associated with it, resulting in people who are not involved with the subculture dressing as if they are. But the fact that these people exist should not matter for authenticity claims on a collective level by hip-hop fans. What matters is that hip-hop is and should be treated as more than just some fun music to listen to on a Saturday night, like Erik mentioned with his example of the Motörhead t-shirt.

What is arguably more important than style for hip-hoppers though, is their political beliefs. As we know, hip-hop music comes from the African American music tradition, dating all the way back to the days of the West-African slave trade, and

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[38] Larsson, 102.

[39] Note the word 'street' in streetwear: these are the very same streets rappers often appeal to in order to establish their authenticity as a rapper.

before it too. The subculture is majority Black, hip-hop's roots are Black, and thus, due to the marginalized position of Black people in Western society, there is a strong anti-racist undercurrent in the hip-hop community. When your political beliefs as a hip-hopper do not align with at the very least these anti-racist beliefs, it seems to become much harder to be perceived as an authentic part of the hip-hop community. While racist, or not anti-racist, rappers do exist, it is very difficult for them to be seen or accepted as authentic within the hip-hop community, or even as a part of the hip-hop community at all, for this very reason. Whether they actually care about this though, is another question.

The last level Larsson distinguished is that of the collective against society, and this is where the subcultural aspect of metal (and hip-hop) is most prominent.[40] Fittingly, she named this section 'Constructing 'Them'': metalheads establish their own authenticity by opposing themselves to outsiders. Being a metalhead is understood as an act of defiance of societal norms and expectations. Trying to fit into mainstream society, if we can take Larsson's interviewees to be representative of the broader heavy metal subculture in Sweden, is seen as an act of betraying your alliance to heavy metal in a way, as it remains to be a subculture met with disapproval in Sweden. This adds an aspect of a continuous protest to being a heavy metal fan.

The same goes for hip-hop, though the historical causes for this continuous act of protest are rooted in a history of slavery and segregation for Black people. Being a genuine part of the hip-hop community is an act of protest. It is an act of supporting the marginalized people in your society, going against the status quo. And when you do not at the very least support this cause, it will be difficult to try to fit into the hip-hop community, and thus, it will be harder to be viewed as an authentic rapper.

3.2: McLeod's six dimensions of authenticity claims in hip-hop

A good starting point for a proper understanding of what authenticity is and what role it plays within hip-hop, is Kembrew McLeod's *Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation* (1999).[41] In this essay, McLeod sets out to lay the foundations of an understanding of authenticity within hip-hop, mainly through distinguishing what factors play a role in authenticity claims made by hip-hop artists. A significant amount of his sources include interviews with hip-hop artists, both conducted by himself, as well as interviews found in other media. It is important to note that this text was published in 1999, two decades before the writing of this thesis. Hip-hop is now about twice as old as it was in 1999, and a myriad of changes have occurred in that timespan. Regardless, McLeod's explication of authenticity within hip-hop, and the developments which he refers to as assimilation, mostly still apply

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[40] Larsson, 106-108.
[41] Kembrew McLeod. "Authenticity within Hip-Hop and other Cultures threatened with Assimilation," *Journal of Communication,* Autumn 1999, 49, 4 (1999), 134-150.

today. The most important contribution McLeod has made to this discussion with this text is a categorization of the semantic dimensions of authenticity claims made by hip-hop artists.[42] Let us take a brief look at these dimensions, with some of my reflections mixed in in places.

3.2.1: The social-psychological dimension: Staying true to yourself vs. Following the masses

The first dimension that McLeod distinguishes involves a dichotomy of individualism and following mass trends. The authenticity claims within the hip-hop community seem to focus largely on the individual, which in this case basically comes down to being authentic in relation to yourself, by following your own instincts, ideas, thoughts, etc. In an interview McLeod conducted with Methodman, a member of prominent hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan, Methodman said: "Basically, I make music that represents me. Who I am. I'm not gonna calculate my music to entertain the masses. I gotta keep it real for me."[43] This dichotomy is an intrinsic part of what Methodman, and alongside him most hip-hop artists, care about when making music: never simply follow the masses, but follow your own path. This dimension thus basically states: following the masses is inauthentic, following your own path is authentic.

3.2.2: The racial dimension: Black vs. White

Hip-hop, both as a music genre and as a culture, is strongly rooted in the Black music tradition as we know by now.[44] It being rooted in the Black music tradition does not imply that non-Black people are excluded from hip-hop by default. However, there is still a sentiment within the hip-hop community, both in 1999 as well as today in 2021, that shows more hesitance towards non-Black hip-hop artists, as opposed to Black hip-hop artists. And though McLeod mentions some explicit anti-White sentiments aired out on online hip-hop forums, generally the hip-hop community is not explicitly anti-White; more so, it is pro-Black.[45] Perhaps more importantly, McLeod mentions at the end of this section, dissociating oneself from Blackness, results in the danger of being called a sell-out by others, basically trading in their Blackness for money. And being seen as a sell-out implies being seen as inauthentic, which is very problematic in this case. This makes the role of and relation to Blackness for a rapper quite complicated. For a Black person, this basically means: stay true to your Black roots. But for a non-Black person, authenticity in this regard is perhaps found more so in being respectful to and appreciative of the Black music tradition, instead of appropriating Black culture.

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[42] McLeod, 140-146.
[43] McLeod, 140.
[44] McLeod, 140-141.
[45] McLeod, 141.

3.2.3: The political-economic dimension: Underground vs. Commercial

The third dimension, the political-economic dimension, has to do with the opposition between the underground and the commercial.[46] Hip-hop originated, as explained in chapter one of this thesis, as a local underground movement, in the Bronx in New York. As hip-hop has grown in popularity within the 20 years of its existence at the time McLeod was writing, a distinction has come into existence between the underground part of hip-hop, and the commercial side it gained by virtue of its increased popularity and adoption into mainstream media. There remains a very pervasive idea of the underground being real and authentic, and mainstream being fake or inauthentic.[47] Making music to make hits is commercial and therefore inauthentic, and making music just to make music, or to spread a hip-hop message, is authentic, if we follow these authenticity claims.

3.2.4: The gender-sexual dimension: Hard vs. Soft

The fourth distinction to be made among hip-hop artists in the context of authenticity claims is that between masculinity and femininity, and in extension that between heterosexuality and other types of sexuality.[48] The masculine, heterosexual rapper is seen as the norm, and any artist deviating from that norm can expect to face criticism and exclusion at least until they have proven themselves in a way. With this norm being in place, any deviation from the norm can have an impact on the perceived authenticity of an artist. Being 'hard' – a masculine straight male - is especially important for hip-hop artists coming from a dangerous milieu, such as an impoverished neighborhood, where a lot of hip-hop artists do come from. At the time of McLeod's writing, this gender-sexual dichotomy was stronger than it is today, though it is still very relevant. With the come-up of openly LGBTQ+ hip-hop artists, such as Tyler, The Creator and Frank Ocean, the importance of being hard is starting to fade a bit, but its importance for authenticity in hip-hop still remains in place.

3.2.5: The social-locational dimension: The streets vs. The suburbs

McLeod tells us that the social location of a hip-hop artist (and their fans) refers to the community with which a hip-hop artist identifies themselves.[49] In this case, we can see the distinction he refers to – that between the streets (generally of impoverished neighborhoods) and the suburbs – as two different communities that an artist can associate themselves with. There seems to be a preference for the streets as opposed to the suburbs in hip-hop, and this becomes very clear by listening to in the authenticity claims made by hip-hop artists. I will show this in chapter four as well. With regards

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[46] McLeod, 141-142.
[47] McLeod, 141.
[48] McLeod, 142.
[49] McLeod, 142-143.

to this fifth dimension of authenticity, it is also important for an artist to continue to associate themselves with the community they grew up in, even after they might have moved away from it. And ideally, this community is in some way related to the streets of an impoverished neighborhood. McLeod refers to some lyrics by Tupac in his song *I Ain't Mad at Cha*, referring to his move away from the streets: "So many questions and they ask me if I'm still down, I moved up out of the ghetto, so I ain't real now?"[50] The streets here are juxtaposed with the suburbs, which are generally inhabited more so by middle class (White) citizens, as opposed to the low-income Black families that inhabit the impoverished neighborhoods that are referred to as the streets. The social-locational dimension then brings us back to the racial dimension. It also brings to attention the connection between income and authenticity in relation to neighborhoods, and most importantly: authenticity seems to be connected with associating yourself with and representing your social-locational roots.

3.2.6: The cultural dimension: The old school vs. The mainstream

The final of these six dimension seems to depend on appeals to nostalgia.[51] A distinction is made between the old school and the new school, with the old school being favored over the new school in terms of authenticity. There is a strong nostalgic idea of the early days of hip-hop here, which is dominated by the idea that rappers were supposedly much more authentic back then. Basically, rappers who make an appeal to their authenticity based in this dimension, dismiss others for lacking the knowledge and experience they themselves have of the earlier days of hip-hop. Some propose that these new school rappers can make up for it by studying the history of hip-hop, like Guru of Gang Starr said in an interview conducted by McLeod.[52] Guru juxtaposes this knowledge of and respect for the history of hip-hop with the treating of hip-hop as a product to be sold and consumed, so basically to a commodification and commercialization of hip-hop. The old school is in this way connected to authentic and a-commercial rappers, and the new school to inauthentic and commercial rappers.

While these dimensions are very informative and useful for categorizing authenticity claims made by rappers, they do not cover the full load of a concept as complicated as authenticity in hip-hop. Authenticity is a spectrum, so the way to fill in these dimensions for an artist has a spectral nature too. It is not as simple as merely ticking off some of these boxes to then be accepted as authentic. Even the seemingly most binary of these dimensions, being the racial dimension, is not as binary as it seems either, due to issues such as colorism and different cultures within the Black and African-American communities, as well as the difficulty of how to relate yourself to

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[50] McLeod, 143.
[51] McLeod, 143-144.
[52] McLeod, 144.

Blackness in hip-hop as a non-Black artist. I am therefore not claiming that these categories that McLeod has provided us with are all very useful, but some of them are, as I will show in chapter four. The use of McLeod's dimensions is therefore mostly in providing us with a frame in which to place the authenticity claims made by artists.

3.3: Linguistics for white hip-hoppers

In a very interesting study, carried out by Cecilia Cutler in 2003, a closer look is taken at how white teenage hip-hoppers position themselves in the wider hip-hop community. Her emphasis in *Keepin' It Real: White Hip-Hoppers' Discourses of Language, Race and Authenticity* lies primarily on the language used by the interviewees, and how this relates to their perceived authenticity as a hip-hopper. [53] Before the actual interviews, she reminds the reader of Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness, which is the inability to see oneself except through the eyes of others.[54] Authenticity is a concept that only makes sense in relation to others, and while there is a certain sense of being true to one's self in authenticity, this only makes sense when relating this sense of self to others. Thus it makes sense that Cutler's interviewees, as white people in a Black community, take careful consideration of the way they come across to their Black peers. Interestingly, she mentions that generally, in Western society, whiteness is invisible, given that being white is the most common way of being in western society, making this aspect of whiteness often go unnoticed.[55] But when a white person finds themselves within the hip-hop community, this binary of whiteness and Blackness (or whiteness and 'the Other') is inverted, with Blackness being the dominant and common way of being, and whiteness becoming visible and questionable. In the same way that Black people and of course any other person of color need to position and prove themselves in a predominantly white community, the white person needs to position and prove themselves in this predominantly Black community of hip-hoppers.

It is useful to take a brief look at what Cutler found about the role language plays in establishing oneself in hip-hop as a white person. A significant share of African American rappers, who to this day remain the most prominent type of artists in hip-hop, speak a form of African American (Vernacular) English (AA(V)E), which is heard in both their music and in interviews, through social media, and so on. AA(V)E is at its core a dialect of American English, with specific pronunciations, alongside some different grammar and different words from Standard American English. Because of AA(V)E's omnipresence in both hip-hop music and in the broader hip-hop community, non-Black hip-hoppers tend to incorporate AA(V)E to some

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[53] Cecilia Cutler, "Keepin' it Real: White Hip-Hoppers' Discourses of Language, Race and Authenticity." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 13(2) (2003): 211-233.
[54] Cutler, 212.
[55] Cutler, 211.

degree into their lyrics and their day-to-day conversations. It is this incorporation of elements of AA(V)E into the speech of white hip-hoppers that Cutler researched and focused on.

In the interviews conducted, Cutler's interviewers asked the interviewees certain questions regarding authenticity. She analyzed both the content of their answers, as well as the language that they used to answer the questions. All of the six closely analyzed participants incorporated elements of AA(V)E into their speech to some extent, with white hip-hop fans making more use of AA(V)E than white hip-hop artists. This is a small study however, so it is not my intention to draw bigger conclusions from this than Cutler's data permits.

In the first interview excerpt Cutler provides us with, interviewee Bobo is asked about Eminem, a white rapper who rose to prominence in hip-hop around the turn of the century. He was asked whether Eminem could be considered "not white" because he is a rapper.[56] Bobo quickly relates Eminem's status as a white member of the hip-hop community to his own whiteness, and speaks about how Eminem's whiteness makes it easier for Bobo to be accepted as a white member of the hip-hop community as well. Interestingly, Bobo said that you would not be able to know that Eminem is white when you hear him speak. This tells us that the language one chooses to use as a member of the hip-hop community likely plays a role in how one is perceived in hip-hop. Cutler notes that it is likely that the respect Eminem has garnered in hip-hop could be, at least partially, derived from the fact that he could pass as a Black person based on the language he uses.

This brings us back to McLeod's second dimension: the racial dimension. But this form of Blackness is different from the concept of race: this is a Blackness derived from the language one uses, a dialect that is at its core Black. The mere use of AA(V)E does not suffice to call any white hip-hopper authentic. There has to be a certain elusive element to Eminem's use of AA(V)E that makes it authentic when he uses it. If I may relate this to myself: it would not be very believable if I started incorporating a significant amount of AA(V)E into my speech for example, as a white person in the Netherlands. I do not have much of a relation to African American people and culture, other than through the media I consume. There seems to still be something in or around this type of use of AA(V)E that distinguishes a person like Eminem from 16-year old Lien, another interviewee in Cutler's paper.[57] When Lien was asked about which expressions one should not use anymore because they are out of style, he mentioned that "dope" is a word one should not use anymore. He said that only white people use this word, which prompted his interviewer to ask him if he uses it. Lien told the interviewer that he did not, and that he considered himself "blackinese,"

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[56] Cutler, 219.
[57] Cutler, 219.

which he claims means that he is "a white person that's got a little bit of black in [him]."[58] Cutler concludes that Lien thinks that he has a unique insight into blackness due to his connection to the 'streets' mentioned in McLeod's fifth dimension. It sounds absurd to establish oneself as "blackinese," but this utterance of Lien does once again highlight the importance of Blackness in hip-hop. Perhaps the strength of Eminem that Lien lacks in this regard, lies in the fact that Eminem is not actively trying to be or sound Black. Eminem, as a rapper, and as a white person in a Black environment, has picked aspects of AA(V)E 'naturally.' He does not try to claim that he is Black, or "blackinese" like Lien does; he is just a white rapper in a Black space, who picked up some linguistic elements of the Black community he finds himself in.

Cutler's linguistic analysis has in this way served to broaden the concept of Blackness in hip-hop. The importance of Blackness in hip-hop is not to be understated, and the way non-Black people engage with Blackness is very important. Incorporating AA(V)E into your speech as a white person in order to come across as real or authentic can lead to a result opposite to what you are attempting to do. Forcing yourself to come across as authentic does not seem to be a fruitful way to establish your authenticity.

3.4: Brief conclusions
In brief, we can distinguish Larsson's three levels of authenticity, being individual, collective, and collective against society. On top of these levels, there are McLeod's six dimensions of authenticity, which are useful to some extent, but also showcase how authenticity is a spectrum, and how even ticking off all of these dimensional 'boxes' does not guarantee one to be authentic, just as how ticking off (almost) none of these boxes does not make it impossible for an artist to be considered authentic. Lastly, with Cutler, we can add another layer to the concept of authenticity in hip-hop, being found in the use of AA(V)E by hip-hoppers, as well as an additional layer to the concept of Blackness. Now we move on to apply these findings to some prominent diss tracks in chapter 4, which I will then further analyze in chapter 5.

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[58] Cutler, 225.

Chapter 4: Authenticity claims in diss tracks

In order to prepare my philosophical meta-analysis of authenticity claims in hip-hop, I will first analyze and categorize a selection of authenticity claims in each of the diss tracks in this chapter, based on our findings in chapter 3. Diss tracks are songs made by artists or groups to attack another artist or group, generally in the context of a beef[59] between the two parties. Diss tracks are the designated medium for artists to attack another artist's perceived authenticity and in turn establish their own authenticity at the cost of that of the opponent. The same thing happens in battle rap, where artists are together in a physical space and make up lyrics on the spot to attack each other, but since battle rap is more dynamic and lacks the accessibility of studio-recorded lyrics, this analysis will be limited to diss tracks.

The selection of diss tracks will span from the 1980's to the current day, and will be chronological. I will select two or three authenticity claims per song, and I will include seven songs: one song for the 1980's, and two songs per subsequent decade. This leaves us with a good grasp of authenticity claims from major diss tracks all throughout the history of hip-hop. I have taken care to include diss tracks that are generally representative for what a diss track is, based on their popularity and their reception in the hip-hop community; this should suffice for the meta-analysis in chapter 6. The goal of this chapter is merely to categorize and lay bare authenticity claims made by rappers in prominent diss tracks, in order to enable myself to carry out a larger meta-analysis of these authenticity claims in the last chapter. With these preliminary observations out of the way, let's get started with our earliest diss track here.

4.1: South Bronx – Boogie Down Productions
(MC Shan diss, 1986)

Boogie Down productions, consisting of MC KRS-One, DJ Scott La Rock and beatboxer D-Nice, was a group located in the Bronx. In *The Bridge*, MC Shan rapped about his beginnings in hip-hop in Queensbridge, New York. BDP interpreted this as MC Shan claiming that hip-hop started in Queens, while MC Shan was actually just rapping about his own beginnings in Queens. As often seems to be the case, the source of this beef was based on a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of some lyrics, which in this case BDP took offense to. *South Bronx* is a reply to MC Shan's supposed claim, with KRS-One emphasizing how wrong MC Shan was for making this claim, while boasting his own knowledge and his place in the history of hip-hop. *South Bronx* is notably similar to *The Bridge* in style, flow and structure, especially with the hook repeating "South Bronx, South South Bronx", just as the hook in *The Bridge* was a repetition of

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[59] Beef is slang for a fight or an argument.

"The bridge, Queensbridge." Let us take a closer look at some of the authenticity claims made in this classic diss record.

1.
Now way back in the days when Hip-Hop began
With Coke LaRock, Kool Herc and then Bam
B-boys ran to the latest jam
But when it got shot up they went home and said, "Damn!"
There's got to be a better way to hear our music every day
B-boys getting blown away but coming outside anyway
They tried again outside in Cedar Park
Power from a street light made the place dark
But yo, they didn't care, they turned it out
I know a few understand what I'm talking about
Remember Bronx River, rolling thick
With Kool DJ Red Alert and Chuck Chillout on the mix
When Afrika Islam was rocking the jams
And on the other side of town was a kid named Flash
Patterson and Millbrook projects
Casanova all over, ya couldn't stop it
The Nine Lives Crew, the Cypress Boys
The real Rock Steady taking out these toys
As odd as it looked, as wild as it seem
I didn't hear a peep from a place called Queens

This big section of the second verse on *South Bronx* is KRS-One boasting his knowledge and part in hip-hop history. He mentions major figures from the Bronx like DJ Kool Herc, DJ Red Alert, etc., as well as specific projects and boroughs in the Bronx like the Patterson and Millbrook projects. All of this boasting is to say that no one from the Queens and nothing in Queens was part of the (early) history of hip-hop, emphasized by the final line "I didn't hear a peep from a place called Queens." KRS-One emphasized his own authenticity and his own spot in the history of hip-hop, while at the same time diminishing MC Shan's place in the canon of hip-hop.

2.
So you think that hip-hop had its start out in Queensbridge
*If you pop that junk up in the Bronx **you might not live***
(...)
You couldn't bring out your set with no hip-hop,
Because the pistols would go [sound of pistol shots]

Again, KRS-One is pointing out how wrong MC Shan was for his claim, but here KRS's attack has an added layer: if MC Shan was trying to make the same claim while being in the Bronx, he might not live. This adds to KRS-One's claim of the Bronx being real, and implies that MC Shan is not real like the people from the Bronx are. This is similarly emphasized in a later line, where KRS-One tells the listeners that people attending hip-hop parties in the Bronx would come with guns; they were hard.

4.2: Real Muthaphucckin G's – Eazy-E featuring Gangsta Dresta and BG Knocc Out
(Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg diss, 1993)
Eazy-E and Dr. Dre used to be groupmates in prominent gangsta rap group N.W.A., up until the moment Dr. Dre left to create his own record company with Suge Knight. Dr. Dre went on to sign and create music with Snoop Dogg, and the two of them dissed Eazy-E multiple times on Dr. Dre's debut solo album *The Chronic* (1992). Eazy-E was not going to let this go over easy and decided to retaliate through his diss track "Real Muthaphucckin G's." The title here alludes to Eazy-E's realness or authenticity too, and he juxtaposes his authenticity to the lack of authenticity in Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg throughout the song.

1. *All of a sudden Dr. Dre is the G-thang*
    *But on his own album cover **he was a she-thang**.*

Before Dr. Dre's days with gangsta rap group N.W.A., he was part of the World Class Wreckin' Cru in the 1980's, an electronic music group, important to the early development of hip-hop. In his World Class Wreckin' Cru days, Dr. Dre was known to dress in a glamorous way, quite opposite to his N.W.A. gangsta rap days. Eazy-E thus chose to question Dr. Dre's masculinity and in extent his authenticity by mentioning Dr. Dre's style from a decade before the diss track, implying that his new gangsta-style was fake, and that he was a 'she-thang,' since gangsters cannot be feminine according to Eazy-E.

2. *Just take a good look at the n*gga and you'll capture,*
    *The fact that the master is **simply just an actor**.*
    Who mastered the bang and the slang of the mental,
    Of n*ggas in Compton, Watts and South Central.
    Never ever once have you ran with the turf,
    But yet in every verse claim you used to do the dirt.
    (...)
    *This is going out to you **studio gangstas**.*
    See, I did dirt, put in work, and many n*ggas can vouch that.

In this verse, Gangsta Dresta is calling out Dr. Dre on his claims to be a real gangster. In some of the songs on Dr. Dre's *The Chronic,* he claims to have robbed and murdered people, while there was no evidence of him having done so. Gangsta Dresta therefore calls Dr. Dre an actor and a studio-gangster, implying that his gangsta lyrics and style are nothing more than an act. He goes on to juxtapose himself with Dr. Dre by saying that he did dirt, he did difficult things, and that others around him can vouch for that too. Gangsta Dresta is saying that Dr. Dre is not a real gangster, and that he claims to be from the streets, when he really is nothing more than a 'studio-gangster.'

3.   *Claimin' my city – but Dre, **you ain't from Compton***
                N*ggas like y'all is what I call wannabes.
             And ain't sh*t compared to real muthaphucckin G's.

In the last part of BG Knocc Out's verse, he claims that Dr. Dre is not *really* from Compton, like BG Knocc Out was. Dr. Dre does come from Compton, so the BG Knocc Out's emphasis lies on the 'really' part, basically saying that while Dr. Dre might claim he is from Compton, he is not real enough to claim to be from Compton. Being from and representing Compton requires a rapper to be real, and in BG Knocc Out's eyes, Dr. Dre is simply not real enough to claim so.

4.3: The bitch in Yoo – Common

(Westside Connection diss, 1996)

This track is a response to Westside Connection's *Westside Slaughterhouse* diss track, which in turn was a reaction to Common's 1994 track *I used to love H.E.R. (Hearing Every Rhyme).* Westside Connection was a group consisting of rappers Ice Cube, WC and Mack 10. In *I used to love H.E.R.*, Common is heard rapping about the state of hip-hop in the 90's, and the role gangsta rap (which is what Ice Cube became famous for) has played in this change in hip-hop. Ice Cube took offense to Common's lyrics, and decided to retaliate with his group in the form of *Westside Slaughterhouse*, which prompted common to reply with *The bitch in Yoo.*

1.   *Went from gangsta to Islam to the dick of Das EFX*
                            (...)
                a Muslim drinking brew

Common is accusing Ice Cube of hopping trends here: Cube started off as a gangsta rapper, then turned to Islam when Black nationalism became more prominent in hip-hop, and then went on to follow Das EFX's style after his Black nationalist 'phase.' He's thus saying that Ice Cube cares more about following trends to remain in the mainstream, than about making good or real hip-hop. Later on in the song Common

goes on to call him a hypocrite by pointing out that Ice Cube, a Muslim, drinks alcohol. Common goes on to claim that Ice Cube's gangsta persona is an act, as we can see in this next excerpt:

2.   *Your lease is up at the crib, house n*ggas get evicted,*
          In videos with white boys talking you get wicked

These lines are particularly hard to swallow for Cube. First, Common tells him his time in the spotlight is over, by saying his lease is up at the crib (house) – his time in hip-hop is done. He then goes on to call Ice Cube a house n*gga, a term used in the days of slavery in the United States. A house n*gga was a slave who served their white master in the house, rather than working outside. Common then follows up with his next line about Ice Cube being in videos with white boys while he is acting like he's hard. Common is again calling Ice Cube's gangsta style an act, and is basically saying that Ice Cube just serves the white man, in stark contrast with the way Ice Cube tried to come across.

3.   *I see the bitch in you when you don't speak your mind*
          The bitch in you, looking me in my eyes lying
          I see the bitch in you, to be hard, you trying
          The bitch in you it's coming out (BITCH!)

Throughout the whole song, as well as in the title, Common is calling Ice Cube a bitch. He's calling Ice Cube weak and feminine, trying to be hard when in fact he is nothing more than a bitch. Again, Common calls out Ice Cube for being a liar about his gangsta persona. He's attacked his masculinity, his originality, and his political and religious beliefs here.

4.4: Takeover – Jay-Z
(Nas and Prodigy diss, 2001)
The feud that paints the context for this diss track started in New York City, the birthplace of hip-hop. We have discussed the role representation of your city plays in hip-hop, but this pride of one's city does not mean that there is no fierce competition within this locale, as is showcased throughout the song. Besides Jay-Z's claims to be authentically from New York, he viciously attacks Prodigy's (of Mobb Deep) and Nas's authenticity as rappers.

1.   *When I was pushing weight back in '88*
          You was a ballerina, I got the pictures, I seen ya
          Then you dropped "Shook Ones," switched your demeanor

Well, we don't believe you, you need more people

Jay-Z directly attacked Prodigy's masculinity here: he juxtaposes Prodigy's 'feminine' ballet classes with his own 'masculine' weight-lifting at the same time. Notably, when Jay-Z debuted *Takeover* during a concert, he showed a picture of Prodigy as a child in a ballet costume on the screen behind him. Jay-Z continues to make the point that Prodigy is not credible as a rapper for this reason. The song Jay-Z refers to, *Shook Ones pt. II* by Mobb Deep, is a pretty typically 'hard' rap performance, both lyrically and in the music video. Jay-Z basically says that this is a fake performance, since Prodigy can't be hard or really be from the streets if he did ballet as a kid.

2. *It's only so long fake thugs can pretend*
Nigga, you ain't live it, you witnessed it from your folks' pad (Yup)
You scribbled it in your notepad and created your life
I showed you your first TEC on tour with Large Professor (Me! That's who!)
Then I heard your album about your TEC on the dresser

Jay-Z moved on to attacking Nas here, calling him fake just like he did Prodigy. The lyrics are self-explanatory: Jay-Z is accusing Nas of only writing about what happened on the streets, rather than actually living it himself like Jay-Z has. Jay-Z juxtaposes his own hardness with Nas's softness by claiming that it was Jay who showed Nas his first TEC-9, a semi-automatic weapon.

3. *You n*ggas gonna learn to respect the king*
(…)
So stop with that childish shit, n*gga, I'm grown
Please leave it alone, don't throw rocks at the throne
Do not bark up that tree, that tree will fall on you

All throughout the song, Jay-Z establishes himself as being above Nas and Prodigy. In the first line of this excerpt, Jay has established himself as the king (of New York), placing Nas and Prodigy (and anyone else) below him. He goes on to call Nas's disses directed towards Jay-Z childish, again establishing himself as far above him, by playing with the idiom 'barking up the wrong tree,' as well as the height and size difference between Jay-Z (the tree) and Nas (the dog barking up the tree). If Nas tries to attack Jay-Z, Nas will be the one who ends up hurt.

4.5: Hail Mary – Eminem featuring 50 Cent and Busta Rhymes

(Ja Rule diss, 2003)

This diss track was released in the midst of a longstanding feud between 50 Cent and Ja Rule. The song is a play on Tupac's song *Hail Mary*: it uses the same beat, and the rappers on the song mimic Tupac's style and lyrics. This choice to repurpose Tupac's song to diss Ja Rule was very deliberate: Ja Rule was often accused of copying Tupac's style. It is one of several exchanges between Ja Rule and 50 Cent in this prominent beef of the 2000's.

1.
> *You ain't no killa, you a pussy*
> *That ecstasy done got you all emotional and mushy*
> *Bitches wearin' rags in photos, Ja's words bein' quoted*
> *In The Source, stealin' Pac's shit like he just wrote it*

Right at the start of the first verse, Eminem follows Tupac's rhyme style and flow to open the attack on Ja Rule. Ja Rule's claims of being hard are immediately mocked here: Ja Rule is not as hard as he said he is, he is soft and emotional, and his music is for women. Besides Ja being called soft, his supposed copying of Tupac's style is addressed and judged too.

2.
> *Lil' n*gga named Ja think he live like me*
> *Talkin' 'bout he left the hospital, took nine like me*
> *You live in fantasies, n*gga, I reject your deposit*
> *When your lil' sweet ass gon' come out of the closet?*

50 Cent continued where Eminem left off by emphasizing that Ja Rule was not as hard as he said he was, and definitely not as hard as 50 Cent found himself to be. Ja Rule did nothing more than acting hard, while 50 Cent actually took nine [bullets] and lived. This excerpt ends with 50 Cent asking Ja Rule when he will come out of the closet; another way of calling Ja Rule soft and weak.

3.
> *You let the streets down n*gga, 'pologize to your fans*
> *Watch you pull a little stunt like we ain't know what it was*
> *Little f*ggot desperate tryin' to re-establish a buzz*
> *I know the shit is drivin' you crazy, you wonderin' how*
> *The streets ain't never want you Beatrice, what you gonna do now?*

In the final verse of the song, Busta Rhymes addresses a shift in Ja Rule's style. Ja went from a gritty 'street-sound' to more radio-friendly rap-pop music. Busta Rhymes tells Ja Rule that he disappointed his fans from the streets, who expected Ja Rule to continue

making street-rap, rather than the radio-friendly direction he went in. Busta tops this off by calling Ja Rule Beatrice, a woman's name, to add to all of the song's insults to Ja Rule's masculinity.

4.6: Truth – Gucci Mane
(Jeezy diss, 2012)

This diss track is by far the grittiest out of the tracks discussed in this chapter. Gucci Mane released this diss track as part of a longstanding beef with fellow Atlanta rapper Jeezy. Their beef started over a collaborative track called *Icy*, released in 2005. The two disputed over who should release the track on their respective albums, and Gucci Mane ended up releasing it on his debut album, without the approval of Jeezy. Their beef developed and escalated rather quickly, with Jeezy putting a bounty on Gucci Mane's chain in his diss track *Stay Strapped*.[60] A group of men associated with Young Jeezy subsequently tried to snatch Gucci's chain, which resulted in the death of one of them by Gucci Mane's hands.

1.   *Go dig your partner up, n*gga, bet he can't say shit*

In this line, Gucci refers to the aforementioned death of one of his robbers. The court ruled that Gucci Mane killed Pookie Locc in self-defense, and his murder charges were dropped. Gucci accomplished two things with this line: first, he establishes his own authenticity by establishing and emphasizing that he is hard because he killed someone. Second, he threatens Jeezy here, and shows off that he has the track record to show that he will follow through on his threats.

2.   *I bought a Bentley Mulsanne, it look just like Tip's*
                       But I never went platinum—do you catch my drift?
                                         (...)
                It take money to go to war, and we can go to war, n*gga

In the first part of this excerpt, Gucci lets his listeners, and especially Jeezy, know how rich he is, but leaves open how he got this rich. Gucci never had to achieve a platinum song or album to earn lots of money, implying he has other, less legal ways. He continues with this in the second part of this excerpt, where he again mentions how rich he is, and how willing he is to go to war with Jeezy over their beef; another direct threat to Jeezy.

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[60] Chains (expensive, flashy necklaces) are an important part of hip-hop attire. It is a part of a rapper's outfit that is very suited to show off your financial success. With these chains being so flashy and prominent, they become a lucrative target of robberies as well. It's also a sign of disrespect to snatch (steal) someone's chain.

4.7: The Story of Adidon – Pusha T

(Drake diss, 2018)

The Story of Adidon was Pusha T's response to Drake's *Duppy Freestyle*, which in turn was a response to Pusha T's claims on *Infrared*. The two rappers have been in a longstanding feud, spanning most of the last decade. In this diss track, Pusha T addresses two main topics: the song is mainly about Drake's absence in his son's life, but it is also about Drake's claim to and struggle with his Black identity, as he is biracial. The name of the song contains a portmanteau referring to Drake's son – Adonis – and the rumored plans of Drake's to introduce his son to the world through an Adidas campaign that was supposed to come out later that year.

1.   *Drug dealin' aside, ghostwritin' aside*
                            Let's have a heart-to-heart about your pride

In the first line of his verse, Pusha T briefly addresses the topics of their previous diss tracks towards each other: a significant amount of Pusha T's music has been about drug dealing and the money earned off it, it is a major part of his identity as a rapper. On the other hand, Drake has been repeatedly accused of having a ghostwriter, something immensely frowned upon in hip-hop. Originality and lyrical skill is of major importance for a rapper, and having a ghostwriter generally harms your claims to authenticity as a rapper. Drug dealing establishes Pusha T as real, while having a ghostwriter establishes Drake as fake. But none of this is as important as the main topics of the diss track, which is why Pusha T does not spend any more lines on this topic.

2.   *Monkey-suit Dennis, you parade him*
                        A Steve Harvey-suit nigga made him
                   Confused, always felt you weren't Black enough
             Afraid to grow it 'cause your [afro] wouldn't nap enough

In this excerpt, Pusha T addresses Drake's struggles with his racial identity. Pusha T seems to be implying that Drake is not really Black: "Monkey-suit Dennis" refers to Drake's Black father. Pusha T is saying that Drake clings to his Black father to establish his own Blackness. Even his father's Blackness is put to question, since Pusha T called him "Monkey-suit Dennis," referring to racist caricatures of Black people. To add to that, the cover of this diss track is a 2007 picture of Drake in blackface, a well-known way to mock and caricature Black people.[61] An additional layer to Pusha T's attack on

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[61] Drake soon gave an explanation of this picture on his Instagram page, claiming that the picture was taken for a photoshoot on the struggles Black people face when auditioning for acting roles. The context did not matter for Pusha T's attack though.

Drake's racial identity is to be found in the beat of this song. The beat is that of Jay-Z's song *The Story of O.J.*, a song on racist caricatures of Black people. The name of this diss track is also a reference to Jay-Z's song.

3.
> *A baby's involved, it's deeper than rap*
> *We talkin' character, let me keep with the facts*
> *You are hiding a child, let that boy come home*
> *Deadbeat mothafucka playin' border patrol, ooh*
> *Adonis is your son*
> *And he deserves more than an Adidas press run; that's real*

By the time Pusha T released *The Story of Adidon*, Drake had not yet informed the public of the fact that he had a son. Pusha T had gotten his hands on this information and decided to use it to attack Drake for a blow to his character. Pusha T has called Drake fake on all fronts: he does not write his own lyrics, he is not really Black, and he is an absent father.

Chapter 5: Reflections on authenticity in hip-hop

Through my analysis of a handful of prominent diss tracks in the previous chapter, I have shown that McLeod's collection of dimensions is quite adequate to describe the claims made by artists. All of his dimensions have featured in the songs in one way or another, and the most prominent of these were the dimensions of gender-sexual and the social-locational dimensions, which both featured in each of the analyzed songs in the previous chapter. This prominence of (traditional notions of) masculinity, as well as one's association to the streets, will prove to be very relevant to my further analysis of authenticity claims.

A way in which these dimensions related to masculinity and the streets often seem to be solidified by rappers, is by references to crimes. An especially noteworthy instance of this is heard on Gucci Mane's *Truth*, where he disrespectfully refers to the Jeezy associate that he killed in self-defense, to add to his own authenticity as an artist and as a person. There is a common theme of crime and threats towards the opponent in these diss tracks, and these threats only gain meaning and importance if the rapper establishes themselves as a hard person. In order to be seen and known as hard, one has to be known as authentic as well, otherwise people will not believe your claims of being hard.

Another interesting outcome of this closer look at these songs, is the role commercial success can play for a rapper's perceived authenticity. When considering just McLeod's dimensions, it would seem that it is very difficult for a rapper to reach commercial, mainstream success, while also staying authentic. But these notions have since loosened a bit, especially when considering artists like Jay-Z. Jay-Z is wildly commercially successful, with plenty of mainstream hit songs under his belt. But his authenticity is not questioned as prominently as that of some of the newer rappers who have achieved similar mainstream success. Does this have something to do with Jay-Z's beginnings in the streets of New York? Or is this perhaps to be attested to his lyrical prowess? Either way, this supposed split between mainstream and underground, where mainstream implies inauthentic and underground implies authentic, does not seem hold up very well, as we will see further on in this chapter.

In this chapter, I will engage in a meta-analysis of the authenticity claims of the previous chapter. We will come to understand that the main role authenticity seems to serve, is to allow a rapper to be taken seriously both as a person and as an artist. And from that, as well as from the political history of hip-hop and the larger history of Black music in the West, it will become evident why it is so important to be taken seriously as a rapper. To get to this point, we will take a closer look at the most important parts of the authenticity claims and attacks made in the analyzed diss tracks, relying on the information we gathered throughout this thesis. There will also be a

section dedicated to different types of authenticity and inauthenticity, which partially depends on the dynamic and ambiguous nature of the authenticity.

5.1: The intersection of masculinity, crime, location and threats in authenticity claims

What stands out the most in these discussed diss tracks is the prominence of these four subjects: masculinity, crime, location and threats. Though there seems to be a slow decline in prominence of attacks on another rapper's masculinity in mainstream hip-hop, it remains a significant part of authenticity claims, especially in diss tracks outside of mainstream hip-hop. So let us take a closer look at these four prominent subjects in authenticity claims and attacks throughout the discussed diss tracks here.

From the very beginning, hip-hop has been dominated by masculinity. Hip-hop's pioneer DJ Cool Herc was a man, hip-hop's first foray into mainstream radio was led by all-male group Sugarhill Gang, the majority of prominent rap acts is male, and so on. While there have always been female MC's and DJ's, like hip-hop pioneer MC Sha-Rock in the late 1970's, and artists like Queen Latifah and Lauryn Hill in the late 1980's into the 1990's, their role has often been downplayed. In spite of of the role they have played in shaping the genre, masculinity has remained central to hip-hop, from its earliest days up until the very moment of writing this thesis. Because of this, it has also been historically harder for female rappers to be taken seriously in hip-hop, as well as for people with a differing sexuality or gender. While it might have gotten relatively easier, it remains much easier for a straight man to claim a spot in the hip-hop scene.

The diss tracks discussed in chapter four also showcase the central role masculinity plays for rappers and their perceived authenticity. Eazy-E accused Dr. Dre of being a "she-thang," Common repeatedly called Ice Cube a bitch, Eminem and 50 Cent called Ja Rule a pussy and a homosexual, and the list goes on. Apparently, making someone out to be feminine in any way, be it in who they are or in who they are attracted to, matters for their perceived authenticity. This is likely due to the still much too prominent place of masculinity in any community, be it the family, society, or hip-hop. Men have historically been regarded as strong, tough and responsible, while women in many places still are seen as helpless people in need of protection.[62] With these outdated traditions still in place, it is not difficult to understand the role masculinity plays in establishing the authenticity of a rapper. But how does this relate to crime? Why does one have to be masculine to commit crimes, and more importantly: why is it, in some cases, important for one's perceived authenticity to be considered a criminal?

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[62] To be absolutely clear: I do not subscribe to this way of thinking.

Since hip-hop still seems to generally hold on to traditional notions of masculinity, it is also in generally expected of a man to be strong and for him to be the main provider of income for his family. Being a criminal, especially as a male, requires qualities that are in line with these traditional expectations of a man: you have to be 'hard' enough to pull off the crime, and the crime generally results in income for the family. A similar type of strength is traditionally expected and desired of a man who holds a regular job. But that simple connection does not explain why crime comes into play in some rapper's attempts to establish their authenticity, especially since crime is generally seen as a morally reprehensible thing.

Perhaps, given the fact that quite a significant amount of rappers do come from low-income families, and face a lot of discrimination and other hurdles when trying to apply for a legal job, crime has become somewhat normalized in some circles as a legit means of income. This is not hard to understand: if the systems in place in society prevent you, as a marginalized person, from landing or keeping a job, and you have a family that depends on you for income, then what other option than crime remains? It is likely that, unfortunately, quite a few rappers have had to face this conundrum in their lives. This in turn worked to somewhat normalize crime as a means to provide for your family.

But this only accounts for crimes that provide income; what about violent crimes that do not serve a purpose in providing income? This type of crime being normalized in parts of hip-hop is likely due to the role gang culture plays in hip-hop. This is, in a lot of cases, very explicitly visible in hip-hop, both through music and through music videos. Additionally, gangs are typically local: representing a gang through your music, also means representing your neighborhood or city. It shows that you are from the streets, which is also important for a rapper's perceived authenticity, as McLeod's social-locational dimension states.

However, not all rappers live in, or represent, this criminal circuit, and it is important to be aware of the fact that simply rapping about committing a crime does not imply that a rapper has actually committed the crime or has plans to commit the crime. A great example of this is Tyler, The Creator's crime-riddled 2011 album *Goblin*, on which he raps a lot about subjects such as rape and murder. However questionable the subject matter may be, in his explanation this has always just been part of a fictitious story he wove through his first three albums. And his criminal record, or rather lack of a criminal record, supports this. Then again, rappers who claim that their raps about crime are based on fiction, rather than real life actions or plans, generally do not try to claim authenticity based on these lyrics; this goes for Tyler too.

5.1.1: The connection between a rapper's lyrics and their lives

On the complete opposite side from Tyler, The Creator on the spectrum of crime in hip-hop lyrics, we find artists like the previously mentioned Gucci Mane, who rapped

about his killing of Pookie Locc, and Pusha T who often raps about selling drugs. These artists, contrary to artists like Tyler, The Creator, do not claim that their lyrics are based on fiction. These artists do seem to try to claim some form of authenticity by rapping about these crimes that they either committed or claim to plan to commit. Since crime is a common and prevalent theme in hip-hop, and given the fact that there are quite a few prominent rappers who have committed the crimes they rap about, there is a lot of weight on the connection between your lyrics and the crimes you say to have committed. If your fans or fellow rappers were to find out that you rap about certain crimes you claim to have committed, and it comes out that you have not actually committed these crimes, your credibility will often become jeopardized. This happened to rapper Rick Ross, who has rapped about topics such as dealing drugs and committing crimes, while he has also worked as a correctional officer in Florida for a brief time in the 1990's. When Ross's secret about his former job as a correctional officer came out, his credibility and authenticity as a rapper immediately became suspect in the hip-hop community. However, even though Rick Ross's authenticity and credibility became the subject of discussion after this news came out, his career did not take the major hit it was expected to take. He is still doing very well as a rapper, despite his former career as a correctional officer. Regardless of whether or not he is still taken seriously in his raps about crimes, his music is apparently good enough for his authenticity to not be as important anymore.

Traditional notions of masculinity are still in place in hip-hop, and crime as a means of income makes sense for rappers who do not have any viable alternatives for a decent income. Violent crimes are a part of the gang culture that a selection of prominent rappers are part of, and threats can be seen as a part of this gang culture as well. In this way, masculinity, crime, the streets and threats are interconnected and interdependent, and because of their connection and intersection, all four of these subjects play an important role in establishing a rapper's authenticity. But authenticity has remained as a relatively static concept throughout this section: let's change that up a bit.

5.2: Variations of authenticity

As we have learned in chapter two with Rousseau, authenticity is something that comes from the self, but manifests itself in the relation of the self to other people. Thus, authenticity is important for your own self, as it flows from your self. Ideally, authenticity would be a 'pure' manifestation of a 'pure' self, irrespective of the perception of others. But realistically, authenticity is important for yourself in relation to others. Remember, authenticity as a subject of discussion does not exist without others, and when there are no others that acknowledge the concept of authenticity and discuss it, there is no authenticity. A person might be authentic in a situation before or without a discussion of authenticity, but since there is no discourse on it at that point,

it is irrelevant. Thus, while authenticity should be something that flows from your self and is achieved by reflection on the self, it is necessarily related to others, both in their perception of you, and in the way others have influenced you and your self. This makes a 'pure' form of authenticity by definition impossible. But this impossibility does not mean that the quest for authenticity stops here.

It makes more sense to approach authenticity as a spectrum, on which you can be authentic to a certain degree, but never fully. And the range of degrees to which you can be authentic decreases when you do become aware of and take part in a discussion of authenticity, since you will inadvertently start focusing on the way your authenticity is perceived by others, rather than merely focusing on how to be your self. Paradoxically, wanting to be authentic makes it harder to be authentic.

Now what reasons can a person have to want to be authentic? While there are more reasons than just the three I will briefly mention here, these three seem to be the most relevant to authenticity in hip-hop specifically. The first reason one might want to be(come) authentic, is because one has heard from others that it is important, or that it is the best way to live your life. Your search for your self is then set in motion by others, and it is likely that there will also be a need for being recognized as authentic by those others that motivated you to try to become authentic. The second reason lies in extension of this: a need to be perceived as authentic by others. This need might be fueled by insecurity, but also by an inflated ego, or an inflated sense of self-importance. A lot of rappers like to engage in braggadocious raps, showing off their achievements and wearing their authenticity like a badge of honor. In this case, it is likely more important to be *seen as* authentic, rather than to *be* authentic. Lastly, one might want to be and subsequently be perceived as authentic because they see that it sells for a rapper to be perceived as authentic. As should be very apparent by now, members of the hip-hop community care a lot about authenticity. Rappers often call other rappers out as fake, while continually trying to establish themselves as real. But you need to have the stories and the track record to back up your authenticity as a rapper. This might be found in crimes you have committed, in representing the place you grew up in, your knowledge of hip-hop's history, and so on. As a rookie in the scene, it is quite easy to see that authentic rappers generally gain more fame and acclaim than rappers whose authenticity is questioned more severely.

This leads us into our two new variations on authenticity: inauthentic authenticity and authentic inauthenticity. I will start these sections by defining these concepts, to then go deeper into some details, as well as some of their consequences. These two concepts are pretty close to each other in definition, and the difference between them mainly lies in the way the rapper's perceived degree of authenticity is achieved, rather than their goals or intentions. Let us start with inauthentic authenticity here.

5.2.1 Inauthentic authenticity

Inauthentic authenticity implies that a rapper wants to be authentic, but not primarily for the sake of authenticity itself. The emphasis of this form of authenticity lies on the fact that the rapper cares more about whether or not they are perceived as authentic by others, than about actually being or attempting to be authentic. The importance of being perceived as real by other rappers then, is found in the aforementioned reasons to want to be (seen as) authentic by others. This person knows that the hip-hop community cares about authenticity, but rather than setting out to do the needed introspective work and self-reflection to be(come) authentic, they focus on carefully curating an image of themselves that is perceived as authentic by others. This image is partially informed by a sense of individuality, to distinguish yourself from others, but also by an understanding of what it is about other rappers that makes them authentic in the eyes of others. An inauthentically authentic rapper knows what authenticity is, knows what to do to work on becoming authentic to some degree, but chooses to mold their authenticity into something that will be either marketable or useful in order to make a name for themselves in the hip-hop scene.

This differs from a more traditional Rousseauvian notion of authenticity, in the sense that this form of authenticity is not merely a result of introspection on the self, but is more focused on the perception of others. While traditional notions of authenticity imply a certain effortlessness in coming into existence, since it is supposed to flow from the self, inauthentic authenticity is more forced in a way. This effortlessness does not imply that the Rousseauvian notion of authenticity is without effort, rather, it is effortless in the sense that you would not emphasize the perception of others in this process. This aspect of forcing one's authenticity, alongside the problem of authenticity becoming harder to achieve when it is something you actively want to achieve (especially for a goal other than authenticity in itself), places this form of authenticity further away from its goal than traditional notions of authenticity would. The harder you attempt to be authentic, the harder it becomes to achieve some form of authenticity, as we have concluded before.

Inauthentic authenticity then differs from authenticity in that its emphasis lies on the perception of others and the image you want to project of your self, rather than on the best way for your self to come into authentic fruition. Both forms of authenticity necessarily involve a social aspect, as well as the existence and part of others in your own authenticity, but the emphasis is different. In this way, inauthentic authenticity is much like Rousseau's amour propre.

5.2.2: Authentic inauthenticity

Authentic inauthenticity involves a similar need to be perceived as authentic by others, but while inauthentic authenticity requires some introspection and knowledge of authenticity, authentic inauthenticity implies a lack of knowledge of what authenticity

is. The authentically inauthentic rapper merely copies aspects of authenticity that they perceive in other rappers, and applies those to their own music and public image. Both inauthentic authenticity and authentic inauthenticity focus on being perceived as authentic rather than on becoming authentic. Authenticity is not a goal in itself, but a means to achieve another goal, which in this case is fame in order to create a career as a rapper for yourself.

Authentic inauthenticity is in this way reminiscent of Rousseau's 'authenticity' of the natural man. When we think of the natural man that Rousseau refers to, we know that this natural man lived "within himself, according to his self."[63] Since there is no very clear definition or understanding of what authenticity is in a general way, it is likely that these aforementioned artists do not have a clear idea of what authenticity actually is either.[64] And if your understanding of what authenticity is, is based on what you see from others, rather than on the introspective work needed to achieve some form of authenticity yourself, then a form of authentic inauthenticity seems likely to emerge.

There are certain elements we repeatedly find in rappers who are generally deemed to be authentic, which are essentially the six dimensions distinguished by McLeod, along with some other factors like Cutler's linguistics. These elements are pretty easy to observe for outsiders and fans alike: prominent rappers who are generally accepted as authentic tend to tick certain boxes, like location, the color of your skin, etc. So what if a prospective artist has observed this, and instead of basing their raps on their own life and their own self, they copy what rappers that they deem to be authentic do? If this copying is intentional and with the intention of using authenticity to create a persona that helps the artist gain fame and wealth, then we can refer to this as inauthentic authenticity. But what if they are unaware of the fact that they are copying others? And what if they are indeed copying others, but at the same time, tick (most of) the same boxes that these rappers do? For example: a young artist X copies established artist Y, and established artist Y is Black, male and comes from a marginalized neighborhood. But young artist X is also Black, male and comes from a marginalized neighborhood. Instead of basing their lyrics and music on their own experiences and their own self, they (loosely) copy what established artist Y does in their music. Can they possibly be authentic, if they are unaware of the fact that they are copying artist Y? And what if young artist X does not tick all of the same boxes that established artist Y does? More generally: where does authenticity exist? Is it in the

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[63] Berman, 145.

[64] Note that I do not say or mean this in a condescending way: many oft-used words and concepts in society rapidly shift in meaning. A clear example of this is how, mostly in youth culture, the word "literally" is now often used with a meaning opposite to its original meaning. Literally in this use actually means figuratively. As language evolves, and as society evolves, so do the words and concepts we often use in society. And this likely goes for authenticity as well. Both forms of authenticity can and do co-exist both in society and on a smaller scale in the hip-hop scene.

perception of others, is it in the self? If it is merely in the perception of others, and young artist X does a good job, then he should be authentic. But we know this is not the case, so what do we base his authenticity on, if it comes so close to the 'actual' authenticity of artist Y?

This lack of awareness of a lack of authenticity in young artist X is what I would like to call authentic inauthenticity: X thinks that he is authentic or real because he does what established artist Y does, but in fact, Y's authenticity comes from his own personal connection to his lyrics, and X's authentic inauthenticity comes from his copying of X's personal connection to his own lyrics. Regardless of whether we call this inauthentic authenticity, authentic inauthenticity, or just plain authenticity, the difficulty in this process is in the crucial part that is the perception of others. The authenticity of Rousseau's natural man, or in this case, the authenticity of a person who does not know what authenticity is, is impossible to gauge. We know that it is very difficult to know or judge whether someone is authentic, so what can we base a distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity on? If authenticity gains its meaning when it is seen and recognized by others, then how does the perceived authenticity of young artist Y differ from that of established artist X?

5.2.3: Stereotypes of Black people

In these forms of authenticity, being inauthentic authenticity and authentic inauthenticity, we might have found a likely explanation for the mimicry of Blackness found in a quite significant amount of non-Black rappers, like Cutler's interviewee Lien from chapter three.

When a new rapper wants to establish themselves in the hip-hop community as authentic, it is quite likely for them to engage in some form of authentic inauthenticity. And since the majority of famous rappers are either Black, or involve some form of Blackness in their speech or style, it makes a lot of sense for a new artist to copy a stereotypical form of Blackness in order to be perceived as an authentic rapper. Blackness is indeed a very important part of hip-hop culture, and Blackness does indeed generally help a rapper's perceived authenticity, but this only works for actual Black people. It makes sense for a new non-Black rapper to believe that Blackness is one of the main components of authenticity for a rapper, since this is generally the case. But forcing Blackness as a non-Black artist has the danger of resulting in (harmful) stereotypes of Black people, as well as being a clear indicator of inauthenticity. As stated before, appropriation of Blackness is generally harmful for your authenticity, but cultural appreciation can be beneficial.

Thus, a possible explanation for the great amount of stereotyping of Black people by non-Black rappers, is likely a result of the fact that a large amount of authentic rappers are indeed Black. The conclusion drawn by these non-Black rappers that copying Blackness would help them be perceived as authentic is wrong though,

as this very clearly removes the effortlessness of and authenticity in Blackness for a Black person.

5.3: Does authenticity really matter?

At this point we might ask ourselves: why would authenticity still matter in hip-hop? There is a distinction that needs to be made, in order to know where and how authenticity is still of importance in hip-hop. It is clear and central that authenticity, or at least being perceived as authentic, remains of great importance within the hip-hop community. But the fact of the matter is, hip-hop has by now far outgrown the hip-hop community. Hip-hop is, at the moment of writing, the biggest genre of music worldwide. This means that there is also a significant amount of people who listen to hip-hop, who are not necessarily in any way involved with the hip-hop community.[65] And for those people who are not in any way involved in or associated with the hip-hop community, but who do listen to hip-hop, the issue of authenticity in hip-hop might not really be an issue at all. The significance of the authenticity question is to be found within the hip-hop community: its place in Black music history, its role as an amplifier of marginalized voices, its role in validating the voices of the rappers, and so on.

For listeners who are not involved in the hip-hop community, or are not aware of the underlying issues that hip-hop finds its significance in, the question of authenticity is not really a question at all. If the reason you are listening to the music is purely for pleasure and nothing else, authenticity is not an issue. And in the case of our earlier example, Rick Ross, this might very well apply. In most cases, when a rapper tries to start their career, the start of their career will be confined to the bounds of the hip-hop community. And within this hip-hop community authenticity matters. So at some point in the beginnings of Rick Ross's career, authenticity did matter a significant amount. But given his mainstream success, and his appeal to listeners outside of the hip-hop community, it did not matter much anymore whether he really was the drug kingpin that he claimed to be in his lyrics. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly: lyrics do not necessarily apply to the life of the rapper, as we have seen with Tyler, The Creator before, among others. As long as a rapper does not really claim that the lyrics in their music apply to their own life, it does not make sense to accuse them of inauthenticity based on their lyrics.

It is not possible to generalize the answer to the titular question much further than this: authenticity does really matter within the hip-hop community, but it loses importance outside of the hip-hop community. For a rookie rapper, it is probably most important to be perceived as authentic, but for a famous (enough) rapper, it becomes

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[65] By 'the hip-hop community,' I mean the community consisting of people whose lives are dedicated to hip-hop, to a significant degree. This includes people who make music, people who host hip-hop parties, or just anyone who feels like hip-hop plays a significant role in their lives.

much less important, mostly due to the fact that their fanbase has expanded outside of the bounds of hip-hop. Being seen as authentic means being taken seriously, but being taken seriously does not matter much anymore by the time you have enough fans or make good enough music to reach outside of the hip-hop community.

Conclusion

The main goal of this thesis has been to both showcase and amalgamate the most significant factors that play a role in the debate on authenticity in hip-hop into one body of work. We started with the context for this debate, being the history of hip-hop and the context in which it operates. We moved on to a deeper dive into Rousseauvian philosophy of authenticity, to then learn about the different factors that play a role in hip-hop authenticity through Larsson's, McLeod's and Cutler's work. After applying these different factors and categories to some diss tracks, we moved on to a set of reflections on authenticity in hip-hop. In this way, this thesis has both provided an extensive fundament and introduction to the subject of authenticity in hip-hop, as well as some new reflections and ideas to apply to this debate.

Two main things have remained unchanged throughout this thesis: authenticity remains an ambiguous and open term, and authenticity remains of high importance in the hip-hop community. And due to the combination of these two factors, what authenticity is in the hip-hop community remains multi-faceted. There are the more traditional perceptions of what authenticity, mostly showcased in McLeod's six dimensions of chapter three. These traditional perceptions mainly emphasize characteristics such as masculinity, race and background to base your authenticity on. In this way, traditional ideas of authenticity in hip-hop serve as a way to kind of gatekeep hip-hop, seemingly to protect this community that is made up of a large group of marginalized peoples from outside influences. But these dimensions are more dynamic than McLeod's explanation seems to allow, which we can ascribe to the passage of time since he put these six dimensions together. The importance of masculinity is slowly but surely crumbling, with artists like Tyler, the Creator and Lil Nas X topping charts, and we can see similar movements for the other categories McLeod distinguished.

And these charts are what brings us to the outskirts of this topic: as we have seen with Rick Ross, who is but one example among many, authenticity might not be as important for all hip-hop artists. Because when an artists reach far enough into the mainstream, their hip-hop fanbase and the values these fans hold become less and less important and significant. Of course, authenticity is and remains of major importance for members of the hip-hop community. But when an artist does not depend on the hip-hop community for their income and relevance anymore, the importance of authenticity for their career starts to fade too.

This is not to say that authenticity does not matter in music outside of hip-hop. But there is a clear difference in the degree to which authenticity matters within hip-hop and outside of it. The emphasis seems to shift from an importance of authenticity and other hip-hop values to an importance of mainstream appeal, when an artist grows big enough to reach beyond the borders of the hip-hop community.

And finally, I introduced two new concepts to showcase a distinction between two different approaches to authenticity in hip-hop, which co-exist with the traditional approach of trying to be authentic in a Rousseauvian way. And these two concepts are inauthentic authenticity and authentic inauthenticity. In both of these cases, the artist cares more about being perceived as authentic rather than about actually being authentic. While in the case of authentic inauthenticity this is deliberate, in the case of authentic inauthenticity this is not deliberate and more akin to Rousseau's authenticity of the natural man. In the end, I hope this thesis has served to both extend and further ground the debate on authenticity in hip-hop, by providing a number of new concepts and insights, as well as by amalgamating the common themes and reasons for authenticity in hip-hop into one body of work.

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