

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/250198445>

# Eminem's Lyrical Personae: The Everyman, the Needy Man, the Hegemon

Article in Culture Society and Masculinities · September 2009

DOI: 10.3149/csm.0102.213

CITATION

1

READS

2,501

1 author:



Anna Hickey-Moody

RMIT University

236 PUBLICATIONS 1,253 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

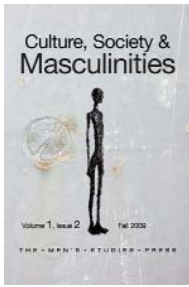
Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Review of Education, Pedagogy, Culture and Society Themed Edition 'Working Recognitions' [View project](#)



Disability Matters: Pedagogy, Media & Affect [View project](#)



## CULTURE, SOCIETY & MASCULINITIES

1941-5583 (PRINT)  
1941-5591 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 1  
ISSUE 2  
PAGES 213— 223

MEN'S STUDIES PRESS, LLC  
PO Box 32  
HARRIMAN, TN 37748 USA  
WWW.MENSSTUDIES.COM  
423-369-2375 (PHONE)  
423-369-1125 (FAX)



### PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.mensstudies.com/content/121105/>

#### TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Hickey-Moody, A. (2009). Eminem's Lyrical Personae: The Everyman, the Needy Man, the Hegemon. *Culture, Society & Masculinities*, 1(2), 213-223.

#### TO LINK TO THIS ARTICLE

[HTTP://DX.DOI.ORG/10.3149/CSM.0102.213](http://dx.doi.org/10.3149/CSM.0102.213)

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Full terms and conditions of use:

[http://www.mensstudies.info/Terms\\_and\\_Conditions.pdf](http://www.mensstudies.info/Terms_and_Conditions.pdf)





## EMINEM'S LYRICAL PERSONAE

## THE EVERYMAN, THE NEEDY MAN, THE HEGEMON

**ABSTRACT** This article examines the lyrical personae of the gangsta rapper Eminem. Eminem's White/Black persona can be seen as interchanged with two lyrical alters—Marshall Mathers the everyman character and Slim Shady, the psychiatrically unwell and needy young man. Eminem's deployment of lyrical alternation invites a performative view of masculinity, as simultaneously commodified and multiplied around an absent center. The gendered persona is thus precariously instantiated as a function both of gendered and racialized stylistics of musical genre, and of the tensions between identity and artistic impersonation in general. The case of Eminem suggests that a studied alternation of impersonations allows self-parody of the macho rapper but only while capitalizing on misogynist lyrics and securing a White man's success in a Black industry.

**KEYWORDS** HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY, MULTIPLE SUBJECTIVITIES, GANGSTA RAP, WHITENESS

In this article I explore the multiple masculinities developed in work of the White American "gangsta" rapper Eminem. I suggest his work is a site of praxis for a range of discourses that are accorded positions of power within popular culture, such as the privileging of "Whiteness" (Fanon, 1986; Grealy, 2008, p. 861; Rose, 1994), *hyper-hegemonic* masculinities (Hickey-Moody & Savage, forthcoming), and misogynist constructions of the female body (Keathley, 2002; Kenway, Kraack, & Hickey-Moody, 2006, pp. 131-132). I argue that Eminem's work performs an unstable idea of the masculine subject and that this is part of his appeal as a male icon: Eminem sells the idea that the hegemonic man can also be needy and scared.<sup>1</sup>

I first began thinking about the cultural significance of Eminem's work in late 2000, when the popularity of his 1999 *Slim Shady* EP was doubled by the

---

<sup>1</sup> While dominant images of Eminem present him as a stereotypical, muscle bound rapper, early images of the performer feature a much thinner, seemingly undernourished man. Pictures that feature him dressed as a mummy or psychiatric patient also allow suggestions of physical weakness.

---

<sup>a</sup> University of Sydney.

All correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Anna Hickey-Moody, School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, University of Sydney, NSW 2006 Australia. Email: anna.hickey-moody@usyd.edu.au

success of the *Marshall Mathers* LP and its especially well received single, *Stan*. Here was a man making money out of his supposed helplessness (via pretend craziness) and his lack of authenticity (*he's not Black, he raps like he's Black, and he is milking this*). Eminem sells the idea that hegemonic colonial figureheads experience postmodern, multiple realities and have multiple subjectivities.<sup>2</sup> On one level, it is interesting to see someone making money out of satirizing "himself" —his masculinity, the genre of music he performs, his race, and his subjectivities (see Holmes-Smith, 1997). On another, like so many other famous *gangsta* rappers, Eminem is a sexist, macho music icon making money out of misogynist lyrics and the always imminently racist overtones of a White man's success in a Black industry. I argue that it is exactly this paradox that has made Eminem so successful. If he were *only* a crazy, weedy man who teased himself about his Whiteness in a Black industry, he would surely appeal only to a select "indie hip hop" market. But if he had *only* ever been the aggressive, "hegemonic man" that he has become, Eminem would only appeal to *gangsta* rap fans won over by the machismo and anger embedded in the genre. As it stands, his appeal bridges both demographics. The art in making and marketing Eminem was exactly this bringing together of opposites—the castrated White man (Klages, 2000) and the hegemonic Black phallus (Crawford, 2008).

Eminem is a very theatrical performer, and often "sets the scene" for a song's narrative (see, for example, *Guilty Conscience*, 1999). He has developed three characters that he performs when he raps (Marshall Mathers, Slim Shady, Eminem) and he moves between these characters in his songs, but will also mimic others (other rappers, women, super heroes, physics teachers, the list goes on) when telling a story through rapping. Through his different personas, Eminem destabilizes fantasies of the homogenous "masculine" subject while also performing a convincing iteration of such fantasies through the overarching, hegemonic, and misogynist nature of the Eminem brand.

This marriage of seemingly opposite performances is hardly the substance of a social revolution; however, it does represent a shift in conceptualizations of masculinity performed in "hardcore" rap music. Gangsta rap has a history of privileging very specific, hyper-hegemonic masculine identities (Grealy, 2008; Hickey-Moody & Savage, forthcoming), and while Eminem's work adheres to this formula, he does so with enough self-reflexivity to suggest the formula is a performance. It is this denaturalization of hegemony I want to

<sup>2</sup> Other figureheads of popular culture not associated with hip-hop music (Courtney Love, U2's Bono, and Elton John) have suggested that Eminem's work informs a "post-modern" analysis of contemporary American culture, given that without the commercialized framework of hip-hop and gangsta rap to support him, his work would have a much smaller audience. Popular presses' reception of Eminem's work has focused largely on chastising him for re-enforcing sexual stereotyping and misogyny. The fact that the media have largely missed the intended irony in his work may have increased the significance of the irony in the eyes of his viewers.

explore. I examine the ways in which the characters, or personas, of Marshall Mathers and Slim Shady perform contradictory ideas of masculinity that disrupt hegemonic fantasies constructed in relation to the “macho” character of Eminem. However, as I will show, in this instance the hegemon regains ultimate control over his unruly facets, reterritorializing both the mundane and the pathetic/crazy aspects of himself in order to reaffirm the power of White hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, it is precisely because of his Whiteness that Eminem can loosen his grip on hegemonic masculinity: albeit very briefly.

First, I want to discuss the gendered context to which I refer by suggesting that Eminem does represent a shift, if an ultimately incomplete one, in conceptualizations of masculinity performed in hardcore *gangsta* rap music. Grealy explains:

Gangsta rap’s dominance in the early 1990s spoke in response to ‘politically conscious rap’ and its middle-class focus. Baldwin claims that the early ‘[L.A. gangsta rappers] contend that the nationalist focus on Africa—both past and present—obscures the daily battles poor black folk have to wage in contemporary America’ (2004, p. 165), their contention echoing Fanon’s disappointment with negritude as a politically effective discourse. Gangsta rap facilitated roles such as the gangsta, the thug, the hustler and the pimp/player—highly masculine performances through their links to the criminal domain—and married these identities with that of the superstar. Such performances invoke society’s denigrated urban lower classes and glorify the hardships endured by blacks. (2008, p. 857)

As this passage suggests, and as affirmed elsewhere (Hickey-Moody & Savage, forthcoming), gangsta masculinity presents an extreme form of Connell’s “hegemonic masculinity,” that is, a masculinity constructed through the understanding that men should dominate women (Connell, 2000, p. 77). Connell (2000, 2005) and Demetriou (2001) elaborate this concept by positing a hegemonic structure *within* masculinity, through which certain groups of men dominate other men (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 835; Demetriou 2001, p. 337). *Gangsta* men claim an idealized kind of masculinity that dominates and eclipses the social visibility of alternative masculinities (Hickey-Moody & Savage). Hegemonic masculinity is a performance and embodiment of “pure” masculinity, founded on qualities such as force and competence, strength and skill. The hegemonic man is physically strong and emotionally stoic (Connell, 2000, p. 5).

I argue that Eminem offers a hyperbolic White (bleached) version of gangsta masculinity, which is both embodied and performative. I also contend that “his division of self [which] allows his performance to extend beyond appropriation into conscious mimicry” (Grealy, 2008, p. 859) is both a luxury afforded by his Whiteness and a source of great appeal to young male fans, who know all too well that hegemonic masculinity is indeed embedded “in the body ... [via] a social process, full of tension and contradiction” (Connell, 1983, p. 30).

LAST YEAR I WAS NOBODY, THIS YEAR I'M SELLIN' RECORDS:<sup>3</sup>  
MEET MARSHAL MATHERS

I want to introduce the “everyman” persona of Marshall Mathers, the name by which Eminem was christened, and which I give to his performance of the depressed and the mundane—“my name is Marshall Mathers, I’m an alcoholic....”;<sup>4</sup> “Sometimes I just feel like my father, I hate to be bothered with all of this nonsense it’s constant.”<sup>5</sup> The “everyman” character consolidated in Marshall figures on the 2000 record and title song *Marshall Mathers* but predates this record. Having grown up in lower working class Detroit with his single mother (McNamee, 2000), Marshall Mathers’ character milks every inch of his “real” White trash biography in appealing to listeners. Indeed, the character offers a contemporary, lower working class iteration of “an English morality play of the 15th century ... [which treats] allegorically the theme of death and the fate of the human soul—of Everyman’s soul as he tries to justify his time on earth ...”.<sup>6</sup> For the working class man who is out of work, there simply is no justification for his time on earth (see McDowell, 2003). Marshall Mathers complains:

I’m tired of life ...  
I’m tired of backstabbing ass snakes with friendly grins  
I’m tired of committing so many sins  
Tired of always giving in when this bottle of Henny wins  
Tired of never having any ends  
Tired of having skinny friends hooked on crack and mini-thins.  
(*If I Had*, 1999)

As these lyrics suggest, day-to-day histories of unemployed life before celebrity shape the everyman parables told by Marshall. These parables also offer insight into the identity through which Eminem “aligns himself in respect to class with the contemporary poor in America in which Black Americans are largely situated, and racially with Black history, which in his apparent understanding is grounded in class struggle” (Grealy, 2008, p. 860).<sup>7</sup> However, on

<sup>3</sup> Quote taken from the Eminem song “*Marshall Mathers*” (2000).

<sup>4</sup> Quote taken from the Eminem song “*I Just Don’t Give a Fuck*” (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Quote taken from the Eminem song “*The Way I Am*” (2000).

<sup>6</sup> “Everyman,” from *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Grealy suggests that

Eminem’s success can in part be attributed to his utilization of class discourse. He inhabits a ‘white trash’ identity—‘I’m a piece of white trash / I say it proudly’ (Eminem, in 8 Mile, dir. Hanson 2002)—which is one originally invoked by African-Americans (Taylor 2005, p. 342) [...] Eminem can be associated with most of the issues described as central to the politics of Kitwana’s ‘hip-hop generation’. His privileging class over race in the construction of his claim to cultural authenticity suggests that America’s shifting socio-economic structure provides points of identification with political positions originally and explicitly organized

balance, the Marshall Mathers morality play tells of working-class defeat more than class struggle *per se*. He is the story of every young man born into a future of limited prospects, every boy who feels hard done by, and who blames his stunted life on the failings of his mother.<sup>8</sup>

#### MEET SLIM SHADY, "BRAIN DEAD LIKE JANE BRADY"<sup>9</sup>

Next, I would like to introduce "Slim Shady," the crazy, drug addicted and at times childish needy persona performed by Eminem. While the Slim Shady persona is overtly performed in songs such as *My Name Is* (1999), *I'm Shady* (1999), and *The Real Slim Shady* (2000), it appears consistently throughout Eminem's songs as the abjected face of his masculinity (on abjection, see Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2008). For example, the song *Kim* (2000) depicts an insecure man unable to live without his female partner, and *3am* (2009) narrates the story of a psychiatrically unwell patient, haunted by his own murderous actions. This trope of mental illness dominates the video clip for *My Name Is* (1999) which visually presents Slim Shady as a psychiatric patient in hospital and causing trouble. A number of characteristics in the needy, scared, and at times decidedly brat-like tones of Slim Shady can be read as the antithesis of the domineering male (e.g. "Kim, you think I'm ugly, don't you?" Eminem, *Kim*, 2000, "I ain't had a woman in years, my palms are too hairy to hide;" *My Name Is*, 1999; "Is he nuts? NO! He's insane!;" *Insane*, 2009). This character of the desperate, masturbating, crazy young man looks like the figurehead of a Ritalin generation of White working class boys (see McDowell, 2003). Rising above both the hopeless, everyday Marshall Mathers, who is marking time until his death, and the crazy runt Slim Shady, who seems to be expediting the process of his own death, is the hegemonic figure of Eminem, who manages to colonize his less successful selves.

---

around blackness. He constructs his Other as mainstream America, the middle class, and equates his own oppression with that experienced by poor blacks while concurrently establishing his distance from them. Describing himself as 'white trash' allows two simultaneous and contradictory identifications: with whiteness, in terms of skin colour ('trash' that is racially white), and against whiteness, as the discarded poor of mainstream white culture (the 'trash' of whiteness). (2008, p. 860)

I agree with Grealy, but also contend that through the character of Marshall Mathers Eminem positions himself as mainstream male America. He is every American White man born poor.

<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the symbolic threat of the mother's sexuality provokes castration anxiety, as the mother's unmarried sexual activity suggests a voracious sexual appetite, fuelled both by her womb and the possibility of 'vagina dentata' (Creed, 2005, p. 23): the vagina with teeth, capable of castrating the misguided son tempted into her sexual embrace.

<sup>9</sup> Quote taken from the Eminem song "*I Just don't give a fuck*" (1998).

---

 EMINEM: A CONCEPT THAT WORKS<sup>10</sup>

The *gangsta* rap persona Eminem models a figure of patriarchal strength, embodying *gangsta* masculinity as a spectacular instantiation of Connell's "hegemonic masculinity:" a masculinity constructed through the understanding that men should dominate women (Connell, 2000, p. 77). Eminem represents a hyper-masculinized character who embodies or relies on not just a disavowal of the feminine,<sup>11</sup> but also a self-appointed White-Black status unattainable by "other White rappers." Calling himself "a concept that works," he sings:

Twenty million other White rappers emerge  
 But no matter how many fish in the sea  
 It'll be so empty, without me. (*Without Me*, 2002)

As I suggested above, *gangsta* culture is gendered and racialized in specific ways, but to see *gangsta* as a "Black thing" needs specification (Hickey-Moody & Savage, forthcoming). Of course, the history of *gangsta* is specifically located in African American culture, emerging as

a culturally indigenous example of black masculine fashioning. At a linguistic level, the term appropriates and revises "gangster," of course, a word primarily attached to white masculine organized crime .... In general, rap discourses as signification of the "gangsta" recall the term "nigga," which attempts to revise and unsettle the historical racist epithet "nigger" while affirming friendship an community among black men. (Richardson, 2007, p. 221)

A contemporary articulation of *gangsta*, Eminem focuses on expressions of class and social power more than race (Greal, 2008, p. 860). But in engaging with and reproducing discourses around *gangsta*, is Eminem doing anything other than territorializing "Black cool" (Hickey-Moody & Savage, forthcoming; hooks, 2004)? I argue that it is precisely because of his Whiteness that Eminem successfully sells a version of *gangsta* that deviates in some ways from the imploded tropes of thug, hustler, and pimp/player.

## NON-HEGEMONIC LYRICAL PERSONAE AS A WHITE LUXURY?

Various forms of racial and sexual prejudice and abuse have long been institutionalized within Western society. Gangsta rap music resonates with a tried formula of heteronormative performances that appear increasingly misogynistic in their depictions of women. The top of the music charts have always been about somehow "one upping" the star you are knocking off the

---

<sup>10</sup> Quote taken from the Eminem song "Without me."

<sup>11</sup> Margo Crawford (2008) and Frances Welsing (1991) also argue that Black gangsta masculinities pose a symbolic alternative to existing male patriarchal social structures.



podium and, as such, new stars often are a bit ruder, faster, more “in your face,” or in some way more noticeable than their predecessor. On one level, Eminem’s fame echoes the colonial tale of “White supremacy.” The history of hip-hop has largely been about developing a contemporary African-American sensibility and identity, and as such has offered a platform for African-American social issues (Fanon, 1986). But Eminem’s reworking of conventional hip-hop/gangsta rap performativity, at a time of hip-hop culture having become one of the most lucrative markets in capitalist society (Watson, 2004), has relied on a media logic that sets him apart from the Black norm.

Media interest has also opened up a site that has traditionally served as a cultural stronghold for African-American culture to vehement attack, as discussed by Patterson (2000, 2001). A White man performing the musical style that was developed to represent the cultural unity and strength of African-American community signals that cultural norms have become “fair game” for the White cultural critic. It is hard to believe that Eminem’s swearing and rudeness is more offensive to White middle-class cultural sensibilities than that of other (Black) rappers — “we got here to fuck this shit up tonight. Now I’m a-try an’ fuck this bitch” (Xzibit in Sutherland, 2001, p. 24).

In spite of Eminem’s assertion that “I don’t make Black music .... I don’t make White music, I make fight music for high school kids” (*The Real Slim Shady*, 2000), Eminem *looks* like a White version of a Black rapper, and he *is* part of a Black scene. There is a fair swag of anger, dislocation, and perversion in Eminem’s work, spread across his lyrical content, his elaboration of lyrical “personas,” and on-stage performance style. The general take on his success offered by popular cultural press has been that his success has come about *in spite* of abhorrent lyrics.<sup>12</sup> I would argue that Eminem became a commercial success *because* he tried to “piss the whole world off.” The content of Eminem’s work is not easily divorced from his style of delivery. Eminem’s three distinct personas are both connected to and dislocated from each other. In developing the characters of Eminem, Slim Shady, and Marshall Mathers, along with their respective aural/visual/physical sensibilities, Eminem replicates a conventional patriarchal figuration (Eminem: “you gonna get knocked the fuck out like Mike Tyson”) that is arguably a cornerstone of the genre within which he is working, but also stages two markedly different personas, thus stretching the boundaries of gender performativity within *gangsta* rap/hip hop culture and counteracting the hegemonic singulars of masculinity.

What is of interest to me here is that the demographic most committed to consuming Eminem is perhaps the one in serious need of an apparatus with which the hegemonic stability of middle-class White maleness can be queried —

<sup>12</sup> “Eminem ... pissed the whole world off. From the inevitable outrage of gay and women’s rights groups to the seasoned liberals of the worldwide media.... Now, in 2001 there’s barely one voice of dissent left. The sheer obviousness of his unparalleled gift has seduced the most conservative of culture watchers.” Alexi Hay, *Juice Magazine*, May 5, 2001, p. 47. See also, for example, *NME*, December 2000; *The Face*, December 2000; *Juice Magazine*, May 2, 2001.

and Eminem knows it: "Its shit like this that I kick to these rich White kids, who just might see how fucked up this sick life is" (D12, 2001, *Ain't Nuttin' But Music*).

It seems that Eminem's Black/Whiteness evades what Richard Dyer describes as an impossible corporeality characterizing the business of being "White:"

... in practice whites have accorded themselves a special relation to race and thus their own and other bodies. They have more of that unquantifiable something, something spirit that puts them above race. This is a badge of superiority, yet it also creates an instability for whites at the hidden heart of the notion of race, namely heterosexual reproduction and its attendant sex roles. Whites must reproduce themselves, yet they must also control and transcend their bodies. Only by (impossibly) doing both can they be white. (Dyer, 1997, p. 30)

Far from "transcending" his body and wearing Whiteness as a badge of superiority, Eminem is preoccupied with the corporeal—he wants to fuck, to get stoned, and to fight. His fascination for carnal pleasures is tied in with the fact that his work actively bridges racial divides. His "blood brother" PROOF, with whom he shares a "D-12" tattoo,<sup>13</sup> is a Detroit born African-American. Eminem conventionally portrays his Black fellow posse members as his family, his intellectual and cultural peers for whom he would "fight or die" (*Devils Night*, 2001). Arguing that his White "trailer trash" upbringing provided him with little other than a chip on his shoulders the size of the Empire State and a serious drug habit ("where the fuck d'you think I picked up the habit? All I had to do was walk in the room and lift up the mattress"—Eminem, 2000), Eminem has schooled himself in the "art" of Blackness (Fanon, 1986).

Eminem's self-styled performance of race highlights its always/already constructed character. It is only when the "White" male ceases to reproduce "himself" and, rather, begins to reproduce himself as "other," that he engenders mainstream cultural unease. To Eminem, corporeal "Whiteness" is far from "a badge of superiority" (Dyer, 1997, p. 30). Rather, it is the history he works to disavow.

To seemingly add insult to injury of the White male imaginary, Eminem fundamentally disrupts the "attendant sex roles" of heterosexual reproduction (Dyer, 1997, p. 30). Interestingly enough, he performs this disjunction in what Dyer might call a "characteristically White" fashion. Eminem's attention to "attendant sex roles" is initially rendered queer through his schizophrenic personae. He is a "masculine" misogynist, but he is also effeminate in his redeployment of a contemporary gothic sensibility. Images of Eminem bound in straight jackets, wrapped up like a mummy with his wrists slit, sitting, derelict and desolate in the corner of a dirty alley, have all been concomitant

<sup>13</sup> D-12 is the name of the band Eminem started with fellow Detroit rappers. Alter egos are a feature of each of the rappers in this group.

with his rise to fame. Indeed, this “new gothic” sensibility (as it has been labeled by some popular media), is more than a purely visual aesthetic—it has an aural capacity as well. Eminem’s music is heavy with the rings of Gothic church bells (*The Way I Am*, 2000) and eerie sound effects. His work in 2002 (*The Slim Shady Show*, LP) saw a reinvention of the “freak-show” genre in yet another appropriation of sub-cultural performance styles. His 2009 album *Relapse* is set in a psychiatric asylum.

Discomfort around Eminem’s blithe appropriation of subcultural styles, signifiers of race, and of class (while Eminem grew up in a poor household, his financial circumstances have certainly changed) may explain why people are so unnerved by his work. If you make your fortune “acting Black,” are you effectively perverting African-American cultural unity? There are no simple answers to this question, and this is what is so unnerving about Eminem’s work. The tensions accompanying politics concerning identity and community that Eminem’s work produces “show up” apparent inconsistencies pertaining to embodiment and its intermeshing with the semiotics of sexualities, class, culture, and gender. Eminem’s politics are not particularly avant-garde, yet he manages to shift belief systems slightly off centre, just so they stop fitting the frame, thus leaving his audience feeling somewhat uncomfortable, and in this, his work resonates with “postmodern” intellectual maneuvering.

Here is, arguably, the first male figure in hip hop culture that suggests boys can be plain, boring, unwell, needy, weak, strong, successful, and attractive—a “schizophrenic” alter-ity replacing a hegemonic ordering. Eminem is no Clark Kent running off to become a different person in which his brilliance becomes manifest. His three characters are all developed aspects of the one person, and a performance of the schizophrenic experience of being “a man” *alternating* in a culture that popularizes violently narrow gendered roles, and working in a cultural industry that glorifies make-believe.

Eminem’s work is a performance of heteronormative sexual ideals that trivialize the politics of queer or gay identities, at the same time as they highlight the ironic nature of the fact that heteronormativity holds so much power in Western culture. Eminem’s work has been strongly criticized by gay activist groups, because of its homophobic content. He constantly “makes jokes” about being gay and while on one level this is evidently homophobic, on another level Eminem may be trying to parody social norms inherent in the assumptive status of heterosexuality, family, and the distribution of social power.

## CONCLUSION

Ambiguous, contradictory, and unstable depictions of the late-capitalist male were a feature of Indie pop and its precursor, Glam rock. Bands such as the Dandy Warhols, The Cure, The Smiths, Sonic Youth, and of course David Bowie have made an art form of bending and reimagining gendered, “masculine” norms. Eminem reserves palatable ambiguity for the White, hetero, stable subject; ambiguity which moves beyond the inversion/reconstruction of

gender difference (singular) seen for instance in Emo<sup>14</sup> music, and clearly antagonizes latent homophobia in much male teenage gossip, in order to appease the anxiety produced by what all boys know, but no-one tells them, namely, that there is no "correct" way of being a man. While the largely Black US hardcore rap community, alternative/indie pop cultures, and would-be bourgeoisie cultural police have taken interest in Eminem's work for notably varied reasons, his concerts are predominantly attended by White young men wearing baseball caps (Hasted, 2003, p. 38, 87, 187, 149, 138, 150). I remain unconvinced as to the extent to which this demographic is able to read the ways in which Eminem's work queries/queers ideas of White power and hegemonic masculinity. However, I would argue that these boys may well read Eminem's multiple-personality crisis with familiar recognition (see McDowell, 2003). Embodying the contradictions of being normal/boring/young/scared/angry does not contradict a "masculine" habitus. Besides: even weird schizos who reckon they are ugly get to be famous, so why shouldn't every schoolboy?

#### CITED MEDIA

- 8 Mile. (2002). Directed by Curtis Hanson. Los Angeles: Universal Studios.  
 D- 12. (2001). Devil's night. [Sound Recording] Santa Monica, Interscope Records.  
 Eminem. (1998). The Slim Shady EP. [Sound Recording] Web Entertainment, Detroit.  
 Eminem. (1999). The Slim Shady LP. [Sound Recording] Santa Monica, Interscope Records.  
 Eminem. (2000). The Marshall Mathers LP. [Sound Recording] Santa Monica, Interscope Records.  
 Eminem. (2009). Relapse LP. [Sound Recording] Santa Monica, Interscope Records.  
 N.W.A. (1988). Straight outta compton [Sound Recording]. In *Straight Outta Compton*. Los Angeles: Ruthless Records.

#### REFERENCES

- Carrigan, T., Connell, R., & Lee, J. (1985). Towards a new sociology of masculinity. *Theory & Society*, 14(5), 551-604.  
 Connell, R., & Messerschmidt, J. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829-859.  
 Connell, R. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.  
 Connell, R. (2000). *The men and the boys*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin.

<sup>14</sup> Emo is a noun derived from the musical genre known as Emotional-Punk and used largely in reference to *Emo* fans, but encompasses elements of identity politics and community formation. I use *Emo* as an example here because deviation from heterosexual practices is often considered a defining part of *Emo* masculinity.

- Connell, R. (2005a). Change among the gatekeepers: Men, masculinities, and gender equity in the global arena. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(3), 1801-1825.
- Connell, R. (2005b). *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
- Crawford, M. (2008). *Dilution anxiety and the Black phallus*. Ohio: Ohio State University Press.
- Creed, B. (2005). *The monstrous-feminine: Film, feminism, and psychoanalysis*. New York/London: Routledge.
- Damien, A. (2006). Authenticity and consumption in the Australian hip hop culture. *Qualitative Market Research*, 9(2), 140-156.
- Demetriou, D.Z. (2001). Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique. *Theory & Society*, 30, 337-361.
- Dyer, R. (1997). *White: Essays on race and culture*. Routledge: London.
- Fanon, F. (1986). *Black skin, white masks*. Trans. C.L. Markmann. New York: Grove Press.. (Originally published 1967)
- Greal, L. (2008). Negotiating cultural authenticity in Hip-Hop: Mimicry, Whiteness and Eminem. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 22(6), 851-865.
- Hasted, N. 2003. *The Dark Story of Eminem*. Omnibus Press: London.
- Hickey-Moody, A., & Savage, G. (forthcoming). The world is my hood: or is it? Transnational spaces of gangsta masculinities. *Critical Studies in Education*.
- Holmes-Smith, C. (1997). Method in the madness: Exploring the boundaries of identity in Hip-Hop performativity. *Social Identities*, 3(3), 345-374.
- hooks, b. (2004). *We real cool: Black men and masculinity*. New York: Routledge.
- Keathley, E.L. (2002). A context for Eminem's 'Murder Ballads.' *Echo: A Music Centered Journal*, 4(2). Available from <http://www.echo.ucla.edu>
- Kenway, J., & Hickey-Moody, A. (2008). Moving abjection. In W. Ayers, T. Quinn, & D. Stovall (Eds.), *Handbook of social justice in education* (pp. 95-106). New York: Routledge.
- Kenway, J., Kraack, A., & Hickey-Moody, A. (2006). *Masculinity beyond the metropolis*. Basingstoke, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McDowell, L. (2003). *Redundant Masculinities? Employment change and white working class youth*. Victoria: Blackwell.
- McNamee, P. (2000, December 23-30). Significant mother. *New Music Express*, 58-59.
- Patterson, S. (2000, December 23-30). Marshall lore. *New Music Express*, 57-59.
- Patterson, S. (2001). America's most wanted. *Juice*, 101, 46-52.
- Richardson, R. (2007). *Black masculinity and the U.S South: From Uncle Tom to gangsta*. Georgia: University of Georgia Press.
- Rose, T. (1994). *Rap music and Black culture in contemporary America*. Hanover/London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Sutherland, S. (2001, February 10). How hip-hop stole the show. *New Music Express*, 16-25.
- Watson, J. (2004). Rapper's delight: A billion-dollar industry. Accessed September 9, 2009, at [http://www.forbes.com/2004/02/18/cx\\_jw\\_0218hiphop.html](http://www.forbes.com/2004/02/18/cx_jw_0218hiphop.html)
- Welsing, F. (1991). *The Isis papers: The keys to the colors*. Chicago, IL: Third World Press.