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Assuming niceness: private and public relationships in Drake's *Nothing Was the Same*

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Abstract

As an artist understood to be foregrounding in hip hop topics such as the emotional experience of private relationships, Drake has the opportunity to shape the conceptions of masculinity that are especially hardened in the context of male rappers. Recognised for his niceness in terms of rap skill and personal decentness, Drake has established himself as a genuine person making intimate connections with his fans. However, this image depends on his disregard, in his interviews and his albums, for the effects of the commercialised hip hop genre on his music and his message. Although he presents himself as a model for his generation, this discounting of context limits Drake's possibilities as a public figure.

In *The Hip Hop Wars* (2008), Tricia Rose describes commercial and personal investment in the hip hop genre. She notes 'the level of corporate attention and mainstream media visibility, control, and intervention that characterises hip hop today' alongside the fact that it is 'now extremely common for hip hop fans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, especially black fans, to consider themselves more than fans. They're people who "live and breathe hip hop every day"' (Rose 2008, p. 8). Given these forms of investment, successful mainstream hip hop artists simultaneously act as commodified products and influential cultural performers. This paper considers the resonance of Canadian-born rapper Aubrey Drake Graham in relation to his album *Nothing Was the Same* (2013). Combined with the success of his mixtapes and his first two studio albums, *Thank Me Later* (2010) and *Take Care* (2011), the positive reception for *Nothing Was the Same* adds to Drake's burgeoning global celebrity status and emphasises his niche in the hip hop genre.

In interviews and in his lyrics, Drake presents himself as a model for his generation. His definition as a public figure is also informed by how other social agents receive him in interviews and articles. Through Drake's lyrics, public statements and treatment in the media, we will explore hip hop's genre expectations as they shape presentations of masculinity. Although Drake is identified as an artist responsible for expanding accepted topics in his genre, we will argue that his characterisation as a decent, thoughtful, genuine person masks his complicity in reinforcing stereotypical ideas of hip hop masculinity based in wealth and virility. These compliances limit Drake's possibilities as a public figure and complicate his claims to be always

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and only presenting his true self. Drake expresses his relationship with his fans as a genuine connection in which he is capable of guiding individuals toward constructive change. Much as he represents his public self as entirely consistent with his private self, Drake understands his public relationships to be characterised by the intimacy of private relationships. Yet, this conceptualisation requires him to minimise the mediation of the music industry. Drake's entangling of his genuine self with his public figure requires a blindness to context that restricts his potential to stand for productive ideas of identity and relationship that might positively shape the hip hop public.

This study is not what media studies scholar Andrew Tolson (2001, p. 452) calls 'essentialist reading of the truth of the "real person"'; we consider Drake's construction of 'not so much an essential inner self, as a credible public identity' (Tolson 2001, p. 453). Using dramaturgical language in his study of how 'we make a presentation of ourselves to others' (Goffman 1959, p. 252), Erving Goffman explains that '[a] correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it' (Goffman 1959, p. 252–3). We can think about Drake's self-product, his celebrity image, in terms of self-branding. As Alison Hearn explains, branding 'works to contain and direct the expressive, meaning-making capacities of social actors in definite self-advantaging ways' (Hearn 2008, p. 202); consequently, '[p]ersonal branders must also remain in control of their message at all times, even in private' (Hearn 2008, p. 206). In the hip hop context, Mickey Hess points to 'an anxiety, or doubleness, for the rap performer, who must at the same time market himself and maintain ownership and control of his identity' (Hess 2005, p. 303). Drake's control over his message of identity is complicated by his former career as an actor on the Canadian television show, *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. P. David Marshall argues that different

> entertainment forms construct different predominant channels through which affective power is housed in the public individual. … The television celebrity is constructed around a conception of familiarity. The popular music celebrity represents variations on the themes of authenticity and communality with the audience. (Marshall 1997, p. 198)

As he has had to shift from the more mediated actor–audience relationship to one depending so centrally on authentic connection, Drake's emphatic claims that he is being himself are not surprising.

Moreover, the hip hop world demands stability in one's character and connections. Hess explains that '[s]cholars such as Tricia Rose, Christopher Holmes Smith, and Adam Krims have theorized the performance of authenticity as necessary to establishing credibility as an artist within hip hop, which values a discourse of lived experience' (Hess 2005, p. 297). In *Thug Life* (2011), Michael Jeffries, analysing interviews he conducted with hip hop fans, notes, 'Many respondents adhere to a psychosocial understanding of hip hop authenticity because staying true to oneself is an indicator of good character, and keeping it real makes someone trustworthy and sensible' (Jeffries 2011, p. 145).

Authenticity's psychosocial work of relationship forming meets with the self-branding of celebrity image. Jeffries defines 'authenticity as a concept that emphasises fixity over continuous social construction and disguises subjectivity as objectivity for the purpose of evaluating cultural products' (Jeffries 2011, p. 136). He explains that

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> [t]he operative authenticity question is 'What sort of racialized person are you?' When all data connecting race and authenticity are analyzed, the answer that confirms authenticity in hip-hop performance is 'I am a black person whose racial identity is bound to my self-identification as a hip-hop head. You can tell I am being myself and laying claim to blackness by the way I rap and the words I use.' (Jeffries 2011, p. 177)

Thus, Drake's claims to authenticity participate in the performance and construction of black identity. Marshall argues that 'the celebrity's agency is the humanization of institutions, the simplification of complex meaning structures, and a principal site of a public voice of power and influence' (Marshall 1997, p. 244). Indeed, he explains that 'the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channeled into the media systems as being legitimately significant' (Marshall 1997, p. x). The result of this discursive power, Meyers suggests, is that 'Who we think the star "really" is . . . tells us something about who we are or who we ought to be' (Meyers 2009, p. 895).

Drake often presents who he really is within a frame of niceness – in terms of rapping ability as well as in terms of his personality. In an interview with the New York radio station Hot 97, when Angie Martinez seeks to provoke Drake by saying, 'I think people think you're nice, too nice', Drake unhesitatingly responds: 'I am a very nice guy. That's how I was raised. I'm a cordial, very nice guy. I don't like confrontation' (Drake 2013a). Here and in other interviews discussed below, nice refers to being '[r]efined', 'cultured' and 'associated with polite society' (OED). When used within discussions of the hip hop genre, nice can refer to another specific quality. In 'Paris Morton Music' (2010), Drake raps, 'I'm not saying I'm the nicest / I just live life like it.' Here, niceness connotes skill. In *How to Rap* (2009) Paul Edwards quotes Big Daddy Kane:

> If you're looking to be accepted as the nicest MC, then I guess your battle rhymes are gonna make you come across that way, because they're like, 'Yo, did you hear what he said? Oh my goodness,' because they're listening to the rhymes that you're saying, like as far as how nice you are or the incredible stuff you're saying. (Edwards 2009, p. 28)

Niceness, then, can be understood as the ability to rap impressively enough to draw one's audience in and convince them of one's worth. One has to appear 'skillful in manipulation' or 'dexterous' (OED), but being described as nice fundamentally depends on one's relationship with one's audience as it acts as arbiter. Kane's statement, however, is specifically related to MCs in battle. Battle rap involves rival rappers going head-to-head in exhibitions of lyrical assault. An MC proves his niceness in battle as each MC, according to William Cobb in *To the Break of Dawn* (2007), is 'gambling with the most valuable commodity available: one's rep and the respect that flows from it' (Cobb 2007, p. 80). Thus, a rapper's niceness depends on eliciting respect and admiration through the cultivation of a relationship with an audience that is invested in the performance and that believes the rapper to be similarly invested. Although Drake is not associated with battle rap, and one could debate whether he is an MC or a rapper, he maintains a brand of niceness – in both senses of the word – that is mutually dependent on the private and public relationships he maintains.

Drake's self-presentation has evoked mixed feelings. In a 2009 interview with *Omaha.com*, Nas characterised Drake as 'fresh water right now on dry land' (Loza 2009). More recently, in an interview with *HipHopDX*, Talib Kweli declared Drake the best rapper of 2013, explaining that 'Drake is making honest music' (Tardio

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2013b). However, other artists in the field have been less complimentary. According to Michael Paterniti's article in the magazine *GQ*, Drake has also been described as 'a "counterfeit rapper" (Ludacris), "a fuckin' piece of shit" (DMX), and "a straight pussy" (Lil' Kim), and cajoled to "come out the closet" (Chris Brown). Common rapped: *You so black and white, trying to live a nigga's life … / You ain't wet nobody, nigga, you Canada dry*' (Paterniti 2013, p. 1).

While this collection of comments indicates the hip hop world's resistance to changes in the male rapper image, Common's in particular also points to the Canadian identity that Drake must navigate. This identity adds another meaning to the niceness through which Drake defines himself. The CBC's program *The National* asserts in 'How Nice Are We?' that '[i]f there's one description we've all heard over and over, it's probably this: Canadians are nice'. This mini-documentary suggests a national 'niceness norm' because 'it seems Canadians really do embrace the stereotype'. Drake uses this stereotype to his advantage when he claims, as he does to Katie Couric in a 2010 live webcast, that by being nice, he is just being himself:

> The greatest advice Wayne [Dwayne Carter Jr. or Lil Wayne] has ever given me and it's a constant – it's less of advice and more of a constant reminder … he's always just like, 'Man, please be yourself. Please don't ever try and be me or anybody else. Don't ever go get tattoos. You don't have to – you don't have to dress any different.' You know because um I, like, from the day Wayne met me 'til now I haven't changed anything about myself. He met me and he really liked the kid that he met … and he was like, 'Don't stop smiling, either, don't try and get mean or aggressive.' He's like, 'Just be you, man, just be you and rap about life and women and family and just love life and be happy and be that guy, be the guy that I can never be.' Because he can't be that guy, because he's got tattoos all over his face, then he has dreads, and he has diamonds in his mouth, and he's a completely different person. (Drake 2010b)

When Couric asks Drake if he thinks Lil Wayne feels trapped in his persona, Drake recounts the running joke that, while Drake got his face on the side of a plane, Wayne's tattoos prevent his participation in such advertisements. Katie responds, of Wayne, 'You're too scary!' Laughing, Couric asks, again of Lil Wayne, 'Do you think he's misunderstood? Because I don't think people appreciate or realise how smart he is'. Couric opposes 'scary' to smart, marking Drake's niceness as an important element of the intelligence that factors into his perception of himself as a documenter:

> at 23 years old, I take pride in being a very observant individual. Like, I really do try and see as much of life as I can through my eyes and freeze-frame it so I can document it in my music because I don't – I don't necessarily have, like, you know, the same stories as Wayne … Wayne could sit here and tell you, like, 'I'm a gangsta, you know I rap about that gangsta life.' You know, I can't do that. I can only rap about, like, my, like, Jewish mom or you, like, you know, the girls I take on dates and stuff so uh so I take my time and I observe life and um I'm proud of myself for that. You know. I feel like I'm a great judge of character. (Drake 2010b)

Drake's niceness involves his skill at rap, his pleasant poise, and the sense of distinction involved in being 'a great judge of character'. Drake's ability to 'observe' and 'judge' characterise the worth of the stories he has to tell, along with his artfulness and his genuine public presence.

As begins to be evident in this exchange with Couric, niceness also operates in relation to perceptions of economic and racial identities. Without gangsta credentials,

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Drake founds his authenticity in his powers of observation and judgement. In an early interview, Drake says, 'my music shows that black men can be intelligent, that black men can have real thoughts as opposed to just shooting guns and – and doing all the stupid stuff that maybe society thinks we do as rappers, as black men' (Drake 2010c). This constellation of his intelligence, niceness, race and class is contained in Couric's opening question to Drake:

> What's a nice Jewish boy doing in a career like this? You have such an interesting background! You still live in Toronto, right? Your mom is Canadian and Jewish, your dad African-American from Memphis, right? They split up when you were five and you were raised in a pretty well-to-do suburb in Toronto, is that right? (Drake 2010b)

Couric does not seem to recognise that, in invoking Drake's well-to-do upbringing as a form of being 'nice' making his career as a rapper unlikely, she is implicitly invoking the idea that those from not well-to-do backgrounds, those who might more readily be believable as rappers, are not nice; moreover, if a 'Jewish boy', specifically, is nice, what is, in her formulation, the black identity that more typically takes precedence in defining rappers?[1]

In his earlier comment, Drake suggests that one's image dictates what one can rap about: Lil Wayne's style means that he cannot 'rap about life and women and family and just love life and be happy'. Couric laughs when Drake says here that he can rap about his mom and his dates, but he has received a fair amount of attention for ostensibly broadening the range of topics that can be included in hip hop lyrics. In a 2013 interview on the Canadian radio program *Q*, Jian Ghomeshi discusses Drake's frankness with his emotions and vulnerabilities, saying: 'you've been credited, Drake, as you know, with opening up the range of what rappers talk about in mainstream rap especially.'

This image and range are viable because of the work of previous rappers. Ghomeshi, overlooking this fact, misrepresents Drake as pioneering and evidences Imani Perry's claim in *Prophets of the Hood* (2004) that the mainstream media 'does not foster debate when it comes to hip hop, but rather encourages the censorship of ideological diversity through condemnation or praise' (Perry 2004, p. 6). While Drake's self-presentation is unique in some ways, his apparent capacity for vulnerability and intelligence is not unprecedented. The topics he broaches in his music build on what Perry identifies as 'tender and loving moments in hip hop' both between men and between men and women (Perry 2004, p. 148). Additionally, Drake's compelling presentation of niceness exists in relation to the 'scholar/intellectual persona' enacted by 'Common, the members of De La Soul, Mos Def [now Yasiin Bey], Talib Kweli, A Tribe Called Quest, and Guru in whose work the political power of hip hop is imagined to be exercised through intellectual social change' (Perry 2004,

[1] In his article 'Old School', Andrew Marantz profiles Peter Rosenberg, a popular figure at Hot 97 who is of Jewish descent and who increasingly serves as a gatekeeper in the genre. Marantz explains hip hop's complicated attitude toward the Jewish community: 'Jews have produced and distributed African-American music for more than a century, and have sometimes exploited black musicians in the process. Given this history … hip-hop has not always been a safe space for Yiddishkeit' (Marantz 2014). Nevertheless, he contends that '[h]ip-hop is having a Semitophilic moment', pointing to Jewish references in the music of Drake, Jay-Z, will.i.am and Rick Ross. In *Hip Hop America* (George 1998, pp. 56–88), Nelson George also explains the long-standing and influential role of Jewish musicians and business people in the hip hop industry. Drake's mixed-race Jewish background is presented and interpreted in relation to this context.

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pp. 132–3). The mainstream media's disregard for how Drake's contribution to the field operates in relation to the contributions of other artists exaggerates his perceived distinctiveness.

Drake's portrayal of himself as a self-aware rapper who is prone to reflecting on relationships works in tandem with his admitted acquiescence to certain predetermined conventions within the hip hop genre. During his *CRWN* interview (Drake 2013b), Elliott Wilson comments, 'Your bars are way more aggressive, man. You're rapping with like a certain tenacity', and Drake interjects, 'Because I'm a good rapper'. By explicitly aligning competence in this genre with displays of aggression, Drake distances himself from his more bellicose bars while retaining any dividend they may produce. Similarly, in his interview with Ghomeshi, Drake responds to a question about the motivation behind the aggressive nature of his lyrics by stating, 'that's just kind of the nature of rap and hip hop music'. When Ghomeshi follows up by asking whether 'confrontation is inherent in the art form', Drake responds: 'I believe so, yea competition is inherent in the art form. Confrontation just kind of comes with the territory.' These comments about the need to work within immutable territorial conventions contrast Drake's consistent declaration that 'I get to wake up every day and be myself'. When Ghomeshi asks, 'Is the Drake in the lyrics always you', Drake replies, 'Yea. 100%. Always me.'

This autobiographical styling is not new to the genre. Rose highlights the 'hyper-investment in the fiction of full-time autobiography in hip hop, especially for those artists who have adopted gangsta personas', which is compounded by 'the genre's promoters [who] capitalise on the illusion that the artists are not performing but "keeping it real" – telling the truth' (Rose 2008, p. 38). However, in terms of Drake's album, there is a strategic contradiction between what he offers as genuine self-presentation and what he dismisses as compliance with a pre-existing mould. 'Pound Cake/Paris Morton Music 2', for example, is the popular record that concludes the standard edition of *Nothing Was the Same*. In the first half of this record, 'Pound Cake', Drake reiterates what he presents as his own brand of authenticity, rapping, 'I'm authentic, real name, no gimmicks' and follows this with '[y]ou know it's real when you are who you think you are'. At the same time, he accesses more conventional hip hop credibility by once again working with Jay-Z, an established hip hop presence, repeating a partnership that previously produced 'Off That' (2009) and 'Light Up' (2010). Similarly, the hook for this record, a scratched-in sample from 'C.R.E.A.M.' (1993) by Wu-Tang Clan, overtly aligns Drake's music with some of the most well-known lines of the Wu-Tang Clan's discography.[2] In effect, Drake attempts to preserve the integrity of his individual authenticity while cashing in on the authority of artists who built their careers on personas and qualities that contradict Drake's self-presentation.

Admittedly, collaboration and sampling are defining features of the genre: 'As "trickster music," [hip hop] inserts itself into the traditional by borrowing and reconfiguring texts in service to the authority and artistry of MC and DJ' (Perry 2004,

[2] Drake inserts numerous references to the Wu-Tang Clan throughout this album. Most conspicuously, the fourth record, 'Wu-Tang Forever', samples 'It's Yourz' from *Wu-Tang Forever* (1997) by the Wu-Tang Clan. As noted in the article 'Inspectah Deck Denounces Drake's "Wu-Tang Forever," Denies Remix Involvement', there were mixed responses to Drake's co-optation of the Wu-Tang name. Although some members of the clan endorsed the record, another member, Inspectah Deck, argued that '[i]t's not a Wu-Tang tribute and it shouldn't wear that title'.

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p. 31). *Nothing Was the Same* undeniably showcases 'cleverness' and use of 'the unexpected', which are elements that are 'appreciated in both lyrics and beats in hip hop' (Perry 2004, p. 30). For example, 'Tuscan Leather', the intro to *Nothing Was the Same*', samples Whitney Houston's 'I Have Nothing' (1992), but it also includes the reversal of Houston's vocals. This unconventional strategy piques the attention of listeners while setting a retrospective tone to the album. The record also slyly includes a different beat for each of the three verses, with each beat being derived from the same Houston song, giving each verse a unique feel without sacrificing overall cohesion.

Drake's decision to present himself alongside Wu-Tang Clan and Jay-Z, however, stands out because it affords him the opportunity to appear competitive and confrontational without attaching his name to that style or persona. Given the cake (slang for wealth) and C.R.E.A.M. (an acronym for Cash Rules Everything Around Me) references, both rappers unsurprisingly focus their lyrics on boasts about their affluence, their musical talent, and their connections within the field. Yet, the gritty narratives of ghetto life related in 'C.R.E.A.M.' starkly contrast with the content of 'Pound Cake'. Drake opens this record by explaining how he currently spends his growing wealth, and Jay-Z's following two verses extend this lyrical display of conspicuous consumption. Jay-Z's second verse also traces a network of artists and agents who he claims have become wealthy because of his career. These references work together with an earlier mention of William Wesley (a consultant for the Creative Artists Agency) and Drake's comment on his connection to Michael Rapino (Chief Executive Officer of Live Nation) to complicate the suggestion of unmediated artistic agency offered in the sample used to open this record. In this sample, the iconic jazz musician Jimmy Smith contrasts how some musicians have to contend with the demands of the 'A&R men' (the Artists and Repertoire section of a record label) with the way in which Smith's record was made: 'we just went in the studio and did it.' By beginning the record with this sample, Drake and Jay-Z immediately set themselves up as established artists in the genre who, like Smith, produce music that 'is gonna last' and who do not have to cater to the demands of their record labels. They distance themselves from the corporate nature of the music industry, yet their claims of authority in their lyrics are based on their close connections to social agents in charge of distributing recorded music, talent management, power brokering and promotion of live music events. They explicitly found their authenticity on not cowering to controlling corporations, while implicitly admitting their enthusiastic participation in the commercialisation of hip hop.

In the second half of this record, 'Paris Morton Music 2', a sequel to 'Paris Morton Music' (2010), Drake declares himself 'the greatest of [his] generation'. He dismisses the critics who act as if he 'should be less aggressive and more pessimistic' and 'more nervous and less dismissive'. His dismissal of the attempts of others to shape his persona and music is buttressed by his professed skill. He supplements his claim, in the original 'Paris Morton Music', to 'live life like' he is 'the nicest' by asserting, in this sequel, that he has 'stud[ied] the game to the letter' and is 'not doing it the same' but 'doing it better'. This claim of originality and superiority is thwarted by his subsequent validation of his success through the references to women and his wealth that are so typical of the hip hop genre. He ends this record by expressing his ability to provide for the eponymous Paris and his statement that he 'just spent four Ferraris all on a brand new Bugatti / And did that shit cause it's something to do'. In the end, Drake's asserted originality is undercut by the conventional materialism displayed here and in his earlier work.

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In his interview on *Q*, Ghomeshi asks Drake about the definition of success in the record 'Successful' from Drake's third mixtape *So Far Gone* (2009): 'I want the money, / Money and the cars, / Cars and the clothes, / The hoes, / I suppose.' Drake dismisses it as 'the naïve young man's definition of starry-eyed success' that the verses were supposed to complicate, but adds, 'that is the rap definition of success'. In this interview, Drake simultaneously acquiesces to, and distances himself from, what he sees as the conventions of the hip hop genre. As 'Paris Morton Music 2' suggests, Drake is yet to offer an alternative to an idea of success based on access to wealth and women. His capitulation to this definition of success works within a larger social system that connects economic power to definitions of masculinity as delineated by bell hooks in her exploration of African-American masculinity in *We Real Cool* (2004). hooks explains that the 'invitation to participate in competitive money-making capitalist work, when made by the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal state, enticed masses of black folk, calling them away from the resistance struggle for liberation' toward 'embracing an ethos of greed, one in which having enough money to be self-sufficient is not what matters, but having money to waste, having excess' (hooks 2004, p. 17). By accepting a predetermined ideal of success, Drake bases his masculinity on a cycle of having materialist aspirations, achieving and performing that lifestyle, and then rapping about even more extravagant financial desires. Drake's complicity in defining masculinity through economic excess undermines his claim to be 'doing it better' than other rappers and destabilises his self-presentation as an inspirational, self-aware public figure.

Even after Drake attains a high level of financial success, his lyrics continue to coalesce around inordinate financial goals and whatever woes he sees as accompanying that level of wealth. This ideal appeals to his listeners as well. Drake is able to market himself as a commodity that, through conspicuous consumption, can associate you with a higher social ranking. In her article, 'Where Rock the Bells fails, Drake's tour succeeds', Frannie Kelley (2013) argues that 'the biggest factor' in the failure of Rock the Bells (an annual hip hop festival) and Drake's contrasting success is the answer to the question '[w]hat do you want in exchange for $70'. She explains that 'far more people would rather feel fancy, look cute and stroll around that new-car-smell arena until the lights go down', which they can do at concerts like Drake's, 'than act like experts, look functional and struggle through packs of overconfident, sunburned teenage boys just to buy a beer' at concerts like Rock the Bells. She adds that Drake's status as 'a heartthrob' enhances the appeal of his concert. While Kelley relies on stultifying stereotypes such as women 'control most wallets anyway', she demonstrates Drake's appeal as a package deal rather than as simply a hip hop artist; his concerts offer not only good music by a talented hip hop artist but also a kind of contagious proximity to wealth and attractiveness.

However, Drake never admits to this commodified aspect of his career. Instead, he bases his successful navigation of the hip hop genre on his skill as a rapper, his hard work and his ability to cultivate personal connections with his fans. He does not acknowledge the wider corporate system in which he operates. He consistently presents himself and his producer, Noah '40' Shebib, as 'the most self-contained operation you can possibly ask for' in that they have full control over their music (Drake 2013c). Drake never mentions the fact that as an artist he is part of the wider music corporation, Universal Music Group, and that his own record label, OVO Sound, is held within Warner Music Group. These conglomerates that control the music industry are obviously invested in signing artists who can reach the largest

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audience through their corporate framework that includes access to radio stations, print media, television and music venues. Charles Mann explains that these major corporations in the music industry 'routinely perfor[m] the paradoxical task of discovering and marketing musicians with whom a worldwide body of consumers form relationships that feel individual and genuine' (Mann 2005, p. 270). Although we will see that Drake indeed emphasises such intimacy with his fans, he does not account for how these corporate relationships factor into these relationships or his music more broadly.

Nevertheless, Drake consistently recognises Lil Wayne for signing him and offering him a platform to produce his music. He also acknowledges Lil Wayne's record label, Young Money Entertainment, and its ties to Cash Money Records, with both organisations collectively referred to as YMCMB or Young Money Cash Money Billionaires. However, Drake talks about this connection to Lil Wayne and YMCMB as a private relationship based on loyalty rather than a public one concerning marketing.[3] In his interview with Wilson, he explains his simultaneous commitment to YMCMB and OVO Sound:

> I came up under Lil Wayne's wing, and I wouldn't have asked for it to go any other way. But at the same time you know, I've become my own artist and my own entity . . . I just try to be as loyal as I can you know, but at the end of the day, I'm gonna be Drake. (Drake 2013b)

Drake's repeated qualification of his personal relationship with Lil Wayne by way of his own individual authenticity allows him to foreground his skill at forging personal connections while maintaining an illusory distance between his name and the corporate umbrella within which it is held and marketed. In emphasising private or intimate characteristics such as loyalty and individual realness in his public relationships, Drake does not acknowledge the mediation of the music industry and hip hop genre conventions.

Drake identifies the personal connections he forges as a form of sharing that might have profound effects on his listeners. He describes his music as a form of guidance:

> I find music a lot more – it's a useful tool – it's-it's-it's inspirational. I want people to use it as a life soundtrack, as a guide, you know, um and not so much as a guide as, like, don't make the same mistakes I did – just-just there's someone else out there that's, like, living a real life and here it is. (Drake 2013c)

In grounding his art in genuine experience, Drake wishes to situate it for applicability to real life: he tells Ghomeshi he loves the times fans have told him, 'I use it as an actual tool'. As he tells Couric,

> That's my goal as a musician and an artist . . . to document life for this young generation that I'm a part of. You know, I mean, I try and speak for young people and sorta let them know . . .

[3] The founders of Cash Money Records, Bryan 'Baby' Williams (also known as Birdman) and his brother Ronald 'Slim' Williams often assume close relationships with their artists. In *Dirty South* (2011, p. 137), Ben Westhoff quotes Baby: 'To corporate, you're just an artist in a box . . . But when you fuck with us [Cash Money Records], you inherit a family'. Baby and Lil Wayne, for example, act out a father-son relationship even though they are not related, and they have even released a collaborative album entitled *Like Father, Like Son* (2006). While it is significant that Drake does not display any real collaboration with artists from YMCMB in *Nothing Was the Same*, Baby provides an outro for 'The Language'. Baby's brief contribution, particularly the phrase '[f]amous and dangerous', suggests how his relationship with Drake lends his well-established entrepreneurial gangsta demeanour to Drake's self-presentation.

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I'm comfortable with who I am and I try and let other people, like, get-that get-that vibe from me and also hopefully apply it to their own life, like, just be you. (Drake 2010b)

Drake describes as influential his ability to 'document life' and 'speak for young people' since his fans can 'apply' his lesson to 'just be you' 'to their own life'. In 'Tuscan Leather' Drake raps, 'Wanted to tell you, "Accept yourself" / You don't have to prove shit to no one except yourself / And if you end up needing some extra help, then I could help'. A subsequent record, 'From Time' publically orients these values:

I like when money makes a difference but don't make you different.
Started realizing a couple places I could take it.
I want to get back to when I was that kid in the basement.
I want to take it deeper than money, pussy, vacation
and influence a generation that's lacking in patience. ('From Time')

This desire to 'influence a generation' resonates with Drake's aim 'to document life for this young generation'. Yet where he wants to 'take it deeper' to is unclear. While *Nothing Was the Same* documents Drake's personal changes resulting from his fame and wealth, he posits himself as a model for staying who you are – staying real – no matter what else changes in your life. Drake does not address the relationship between his fame and his influential realness.

When questioned about what 'real' means to him in an interview with *Complex*, Drake explains that it is

if you can get those words on there that are refreshing, even if we're all saying the same thing, which is, "I have money. I have bitches. My swag is way up." We may all be saying the same thing if you really break it down to the core of what we're really getting at. (Scott 2011)

Yet if rappers are all talking about their 'money', 'bitches' and 'swag', how do they access core emotions with which fans can connect? Rose explains that artists marketed as 'keeping it real' portray themselves as 'remaining exactly as they'd be if they were not famous, except richer' (2008, p. 38). This 'except richer' is precisely the issue. Drake founds his relationships with his fans in his realness, and while recognising the new woes that come with his new wealth, he does not examine how the wealth might affect his ability to document life in a way that will be valuably real to his fans. He considers only how he might touch lives as a genuine person, not how he affects his generation with the messages he sends as a wealthy artist shaped by fame in the hip hop context.

'Started from the Bottom' and 'Worst Behavior' are two records on *Nothing Was the Same* that illuminate Drake's contradictory presentation of realness and personal connection. In 'Started from the Bottom', Drake begins his first verse with, 'I done kept it real from the jump'. The bridge repeats this sentiment with 'Story stayed the same, I never changed it' and 'Story stayed the same through the money and the fame'. As the third record of the album and as one of its singles, 'Started from the Bottom' offers a concise message of hard-earned success over a simple beat that strives to be catchy and memorable. The video for this record, by including recognisable symbols of Toronto alongside scenes of playful camaraderie, portrays Drake as loyal, successful and relatable. It also ascribes to the Canadian context a light, humorous tone as opposed to the rough aggression associated with the American context in the video for 'Worst Behavior'. While Drake is committed to his friends and family, he stands by his trademark reluctance to form new

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relationships: 'No new niggas, nigga, we don't feel that / Fuck a fake friend, where your real friends at'. His charismatic attitude, which is relayed sonically and visually, is offered as the impetus behind his rise from a supposed working-class background to the celebrity status he now enjoys. This self-presentation may align with Drake's autobiographical style, but his display of these conditions as 'the bottom' trivialises the real socio-economic problems faced by those at 'the bottom' rung of society. Similarly, the symbols of wealth on display throughout the video, including him dancing next to his flashy car, flying his private jet and partying in a mansion on a tropical island, highlight the difference between the life he presents and the lives of most of his fans.

'Worst Behavior' also depends on an autobiographical style that juxtaposes Drake's wealth and his personal connections. The video is set in Memphis, where Drake's father lives and where Drake spent some of his childhood.[4] It foregrounds Drake's father and includes Memphis rappers like MJG, Juicy J and Project Pat. If, as Carol Vernallis argues in *Experiencing Music Video* (2004, p. 98), music videos 'create the illusion that one can inhabit a place authentically, with some sort of grace and authority', then 'Worst Behavior' situates Drake as inherently of Memphis. He does not relinquish his Canadian background as his lyrics include references to his mother and his role in *Degrassi*, but there is an emphasis on the Memphis setting and on an aggressive attitude that is absent from most of his other work. The record jars listeners with an unexpected, shouted hook that calls attention to itself without saying much and includes a beat that deliberately avoids finesse. Its repetitive lyrical style depends on the lines, 'Motherfucker never loved us' and 'I'm on my worst behavior'. The cars, suits and gold chains exhibited throughout this video supplement Drake's hyper-masculine assertions, as does his re-articulation of Mase's iconic braggadocio from the Notorious B.I.G. single 'Mo Money, Mo Problems' (1997). Despite an attempt to appear local and familiar, Drake consistently identifies himself as more successful than everyone around him. He articulates Mase's lines while strolling down a Memphis street, flanked by a group of individuals as if he is among his peers. This visual suggests he is part of their world as they are part of his, yet as they continue walking, Drake raps about collecting cheques that pay him '[e]nough to make you throw up'. He adds, 'where I reside it look like a resort inside / Nigga where your shit from? I imported mine'. Whether he is calling out other rappers, his detractors or his fans, Drake paradoxically casts himself as both equal and superior.

In *Unruly Media* (2013, p. 223, note 58), Vernallis discusses the use of space in 'nineties hip-hop videos', explaining that 'the expensive, fancy car moving in slow motion with a focus on the hubcaps was a common trope'. The luxury cars and other conspicuous symbols of wealth on display in both 'Started from the Bottom' and 'Worst Behavior' may therefore be less indicative of Drake's artistic expression and more suggestive of industry trends. Similarly, Perry reminds us that '[w]hile famous persons have a legally cognizable property interest in their public images as a whole, when they consent to making a music video, they grant the record company the use of their image' (Perry 2004, p. 188). By recognising the extent of Drake's control over these music videos, we acknowledge that some of the props and tropes

[4] A 10-minute long, extended cut of this video was released, but a shorter four-and-a-half-minute version is also available. Our analysis focuses on elements present in both versions.

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at play can act in tension with his desired self-presentation. However, Drake's lyrics fully endorse the conspicuous consumption displayed. This compulsive demonstration of superiority is representative of Drake's performance of conventional masculinity in both of these records and their videos and in the album as a whole. He carefully avoids explicit association with familiar signifiers of the gangsta persona prevalent in certain sections of mainstream hip hop: references to drugs, guns, prison and violence toward the police. In response to Ghomeshi's question about the appeal of a hood status in hip hop, Drake notes that

> there are a lot of things that are off-limits to me and it's not because someone told me they're off-limits to me. I just make them off-limits to myself because I'm not going to step out of my character just to finish a record. (Drake 2013c)

In speaking to *GQ*, he dismisses the misconception that 'any part of [him] wants to be gangster or hood'. Nevertheless, his performance of masculinity still relies on the classist and sexist posturing characteristic of patriarchal socialisation. 'Worst Behavior' foregrounds masculinity based on toughness or aggression, and both 'Worst Behavior' and 'Started from the Bottom' equate individual success with economic excess. Drake's presentation of masculinity and, in particular, black masculinity in these terms resonates with hooks' explanation that

> [p]atriarchal hip-hop ushered in a world where black males could declare that they were "keeping it real" when what they were really doing was taking the dead patriarchal protest of the black power movement and rearticulating it in forms that, though entertaining, had for the most part no transformative power. (hooks 2004, p. 150)

Drake's seemingly unique self-presentation becomes more familiar once we contextualise his rhetoric.

In considering 'the larger and more significant trend that has come to define commercial hip hop as a whole', Rose identifies the 'trinity of commercial hip hop – the black gangsta, pimp, and ho –' that 'has been promoted and accepted to the point where it now dominates the genre's storytelling worldview' (Rose 2008, p. 4). When situated within these conventions of the genre, Drake's seemingly innocuous repetition of Mase's line, 'Same old pimp … you know ain't nothin' changed', in 'Worst Behavior' is more meaningful as it is demonstrative of the unchanged patriarchal script within the genre. The video for 'Started from the Bottom' emphasises this demeaning of women. It includes a skit in which one character ogles a young woman's cleavage while clumsily attempting to flirt with her. Another character then promises 'to take care' of her and instructs, 'don't be shy', quickly followed by 'or be shy'. While the skit is obviously meant to ridicule these characters and their pretensions of attractive masculinity, this humour does not counteract the use of women as ornaments throughout the video. In a subsequent scene, Drake relaxes on his private jet while the camera pans over the body of a reclining woman whose face is hidden as she lies on her stomach. Her face-down position emphasises the freedom with which one might view her body, and view it as an object; she is cast as a prop that emphasises Drake's virility as his jet emphasises his wealth. Similarly, as Drake and his friends party in his mansion, the gyrating, scantily clad bodies of women are offered as evidence that Drake and his team are successful. Jeffries explains that, according to surveys he conducted, hip hop fans 'believe that degrading representations of women are based in reality and are therefore authentic' (Jeffries 2011, p. 176).

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According to Vernallis, 'part of the aesthetics of web-based music video lies in its grounding function' (Vernallis 2013, p. 185, note 27). In relation to the frenetic pace associated with Internet use, 'a three- to five minute moment of music can actually provide both ground and respite – a moment of emotional connection. Shared with others, videos take on a social dimension' (Vernallis 2013, p. 185, note 27). Drake's use of women as props and as markers of the successful man frames misogyny – particularly as he presents his career as the skilful communication of his real experiences for emulation by his fans – as a worthy and authentic way of being.

While misogyny and patriarchy are not limited to Drake's music or the hip hop genre, Drake's more aggressive and misogynistic moments are noteworthy because they are typically masked by his nice guy image. As Paterniti puts it, Drake's 'tough-guy posturing seems occasionally halfhearted because, after all, he seems so kind of . . . *decent*' (2013, p. 4). In a recent article for the *BBC*, Greg Kot claims that Drake's attention to familial and romantic relationships challenges the notions of masculinity typically available in hip hop. Interestingly, the article itself implicitly holds up traditional notions of masculinity as it discusses Drake's challenge to them. Kot characterises feelings as weakness as his title, 'Is Drake the first hip hop star to make weakness cool?', treats weakness as a synonym for having emotions. Kot also assumes that revealed weakness appeals particularly to women:

> For the first time, we had a mainstream rap star whose persona was based on exposing his weaknesses rather than masking them. Was he pandering to a female audience to sell records? Perhaps. But the skill of his work argued otherwise. His meld of craftsmanship and emotion felt genuine. (Kot 2013)

While demonstrating the ingrained nature of gendered ideas about emotional display, Kot's interpretation also suggests that it is Drake's skill that proves his display of emotion as genuine. Given that Kot notes the voice of the records as a 'persona', this rationale is odd; he indicates that not genuine (i.e. not autobiographical) emotion would be pandering, but that the evidence for this pandering would be a lack of craftsmanship. The involvement of emotion, then, depends on real feeling as well as on the artistic skill needed to prove its realness. Although he does include vulnerability in his records, this weakness is neutralised to the extent that it is delivered through the cleverness and skill which Drake and the wider hip hop arena emphasise as strengths. That is, what new possibilities Drake does introduce into hip hop are counterbalanced by an equivalent focus on what is already accepted.

Yet, Drake's genuineness lets him distance himself from his participation in these accepted conventions. When Couric asks him about his use of demeaning language, Drake provides his person as proof of his value of women, while relegating his speech as a public figure to the conventions of hip hop:

> [t]he b-word is at times definitely demeaning. But I really do feel like a lot of the things in hip hop are context related. It's all about how you say it and how you deliver the product, what type of guy you are. . . . I'm not, definitely not, you know, the type of guy that demeans women. I value women because one of the greatest women in the world raised me to be this guy that I am. So I could never not see the value in a woman. And I think that sometimes you just gotta chalk it up as hip hop. (Drake 2010b)

Drake, a genuinely nice guy, could not demean women; he denies his accountability for comments he makes as a public figure by demonstrating his real-life good behaviour. Since he collapses his private and public identities, he is able to shift onto the

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context aspects of his public life that do not fit with his private identity. Rose writes, 'Our public speech and behavior matter, especially in our media-saturated and market-driven environment' (Rose 2008, p. 190); if Drake has the opportunity to positively inspire a generation by way of his genuine presence in the media, it matters that he avoids taking personal responsibility for his role in a broader cultural scene.

Further, Drake explains his use of demeaning language as a demonstration of his skill. In an article for *Maclean's*, Jonathon Gatehouse approvingly quotes Drake as saying, 'Even if I say the word "bitch," I always try to say it in a coy, witty way' (Gatehouse 2010, p. 2). In fact, despite the attention Drake gets for redefining gender conventions, Drake's niceness to women in his music is less kindness than it is 'finely discriminative', 'skillful in manipulation' and 'carefully accurate' (OED). In an interview with *CNN*, Drake explains that women enter his records as objects of study:

> I'm inspired by the makeup of a woman. You know, their mind, their conversation, the emotions that they, you know, exude and that pour out of them. I love women, I love to study women. I'm not a woman*iser*, but I love to study um just um behavioural patterns in women and really how to interact with them because I like to write for them. (Drake 2010a)

The emotions involved in the records he writes for women belong not to Drake, but to the women from whom they 'exude'. Drake's study of a woman's 'makeup' and 'behavioural patterns' suggests a rational study demonstrating male intellect much more than it does an emotional response within a positive relationship. His unprovoked clarification that he is not a womaniser is an odd defence of his comments, suggesting some awareness that the way he makes women the objects of his study might be objectifying.

Drake notes his skill at documentation in similar comments to Couric: 'I study human beings um specifically women and their patterns and I try and um in songs I try to pinpoint moments that people think about but just don't know how to necessarily verbalise.' In his lyrics, Drake repeatedly suggests that he studies women to verbalise what he knows they know, but that they need him to tell them. 'Hold on We're Going Home' begins with watching: 'I got my eyes on you.' This studying leads to the hook, 'Cause you're a good girl and you know it. / You act so different around me. / Cause you're a good girl and you know it. / I know exactly who you could be.' Drake sees something in this woman that he insists she knows about herself but that she hides from him. He sees her essential being – that she is 'a good girl' – that is not evident in her 'act.' He knows who she is and what she 'could be'. This form of praise is an example of how, in Rose's words,

> respectful, elevating images and phrases remain a central means by which black women's complicit subordination to respectful patriarchal power has been secured: 'be respectable,' 'stand by your man,' 'look pretty,' 'be modest,' and so on. Respect for women is part of an exchange that rewards women who follow these rules. It is distinct from, say, the need to show respect for all people. … The most visible representations of black women in hip hop reflect the hallmarks of mainstream masculinity: They regularly use women as props that boost male ego, treat women's bodies as sexual objects, and divide women into groups that are worthy of protection and respect and those that are not. Thus, hip hop does not break from the fundamental logic of mainstream masculinity so much as convey it with excess, bravado, and extra insult. (Rose 2008, p. 119)

In telling a woman she is a good girl despite the evidence of how '[y]ou act', or, in '305 to My City', that 'you smart and you know it', or, in 'The Motion', that '[y]ou're

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reckless and you know it', Drake's observations assert his thoughtful study and skilful documentation over the self-knowledge of the women he observes.

In 'Too Much', he similarly finds his mother acting in discord with what is 'true': 'Hate the fact my mom cooped up in her apartment, telling herself / That she's too sick to get dressed up and go do shit, like that's true shit.' Drake's mother responded with anger at these lines. As Drake tells Wilson in an interview,

> She was upset because she felt like um it warranted a personal conversation before I went and said that in a song and what I had to remind her of is that we had had this conversation many times over and I felt like it wasn't going anywhere and it was sitting on my chest so heavy that one night when I had that second verse to finish it just all it-it-it-it was like a huge release. (Drake 2013b)

Drake focuses on his own experience of those conversations and his liberation in making his observations public. In response to his mother's discomfort with these lyrics, he issued a disclaimer before his performance of 'Too Much' on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*. He explains this disclaimer to Wilson:

> [S]ince I chose to communicate that message to her publically I also wanted to communicate another message to her publically which was that … 'I love you, you know I do. I love you with all my heart and I want the best for you.' … So uh I gave that disclaimer because um I felt partly guilty and also because I wanted her to know how much I really loved her in front of the whole world. (Drake 2013b)

Drake's disclaimer is not an apology but an assertion of the strength of their relationship. Yet, in speaking to that strength, he focuses on his own fears and on how his mother's choices do not correspond with what he wants for her.

In speaking about his mother's reaction to his lyrics about her, he adds,

> I've got hit up by, like, girls before or, like, whatever, people who felt like they got mis-mentioned in a song. And I never do it out of malice. I don't try to exploit the people in my life. … I do tell my story though. … And any girl that I ever mentioned anyway she loves it anyway [laughter]. (Drake 2013b)

This comment suggests that Drake does not take seriously how his fame influences the lives of those around him, although he cares about how his fame affects how those around him treat him. In 'Connect' Drake warns, 'Don't talk to me like I'm famous / And don't assume cause I don't respect assumptions babe / I'm just tryna connect with somethin' babe'. Yet in the outro, he raps, 'I treat you good girl, like you're famous'. While refusing to be treated like he is famous (although he is), he inconsistently asserts as a value treating this girl like she is famous (which he has the power to do because he is famous). The operation of Drake's fame in his intimate relationships becomes contradictory as he avoids acknowledging how fame changes – if only by virtue of introducing new contexts shaping his life – the way he operates in his relationships.

In 'Too Much', Drake states the danger being treated differently has for his ability to document the world in his art:

> And all my family from the M-Town that I've been 'round, started treating
> me like I'm 'him' now.
> Like we don't know each other, we ain't grow together, we just friends now.

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> Shit got me feeling pinned down, pick the pen up or put the pen down.
> Writing to you from a distance like a pen pal, but we've been down. ('Too Much')

His writing stalls when he is treated like he is not intimately known; Drake explains the effect of being approached as 'him' rather than as himself to be one of 'distance'. So many of the record titles on this album are about travel over distance: 'Furthest Thing', 'Started from the Bottom', 'From Time', 'Hold On, We're Going Home', 'Connect', 'Come Thru' and 'The Motion'. A concern with genuine, intimate connection characterises his album as much as it does his comments in interviews.

Yet, during Drake's interview with Wilson, a question from the audience demonstrates what is missing from intimate connection that disregards the contexts of that connection:

> You said you use your tracks to air out a lot of your feelings, so, like, what's the real life application of that because you got a lot of young men out here sub-tweeting their feelings rather than saying them, you know, so how are you letting the people in your life – how are you letting the people in your life know these things you know a) before you get them on a track or, I mean, what's that process like? (Drake 2013b)

Drake's response privileges 'real life' connection without answering the question:

> Twitter isn't real … There's no gauge on real life on Twitter. That's a terrible medium to like exist in. … [T]ell somebody, like, come meet me for a drink, let's have dinner, let's go for a walk, like, you know, like, real life shit … As far as communication goes, like, it's about whatever works for you. You know, what works for me is music. (Drake 2013b)

Drake makes no case for a real life application for his music's honest communication. His answer focuses on how Twitter is not real life because it is not face-to-face, but overlooks the fact that, unless you count the sea of anonymous faces in the audience of a concert, neither is his music. This woman asks how Drake's music can alter the limiting idea that men should not show emotion. She wants to know how it might provide strategies to bolster relationships injured by this silence of and about male feelings. Although Drake makes repeated claims that he offers his music to guide his fans in living their lives, he does not address its relationship to these harmful gender dynamics. Although he has characterised it as such before, he does not take this opportunity to reflect on his music's potential to function as a tool for living.

It seems true that Drake could be an inspirational figure for his fans; if guiding young people to living more truly as themselves and achieving more honest relationships were his consistent aim, he would be in an excellent position to achieve it. Rose notes 'the direct connection between rappers' popularity and young people's identification with and emulation of their attitudes and personas that result precisely from the autobiographical and "reality-based" terms of their performances' (Rose 2008, p. 190). Jeffries 'follow[s] Jon L. Jackson (2005) and suggest[s] that hip-hop authenticity is better understood as sincerity – that is, repeated efforts on behalf of performers to build connections among themselves and with their audiences' (Jeffries 2011, p. 117). Drake's reception suggests that his fans understand his presentation of himself and his experiences to be sincere. His career is based in a stance that invites his fans to consider themselves in relation to him, to compare their experiences with his, and to find solace in this company. Yet he does not follow through on mobilising those connections in positive ways. Concerned

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with the genuine intimacy of his relationships, he does not interrogate the limits of intimacy in the public realm.

Drake treats the public relationships that he forms as an artist as though they can be considered as intimate personal relationships:

> I'm in this for the long-term. I feel like I've built a strong enough relationship with the people. … The people will dictate how long you stay in this game. … You know I'm here – I work tirelessly to stay on their mind, you know, to give them moments where it's-it's going to be hard for us to disconnect or fall apart. I wanna, I wanna build personal relationships, even if we've never met, I wanna build personal relationships. (Drake 2013b)

In 'Tuscan Leather', Drake presents his intimate relationships as being of central value to his career:

> I'll compromise if I have to, I gotta stay with the family.
> Not even talkin' to Nicki, communication is breakin'.
> I dropped the ball on some personal shit, I need to embrace it.
> I'm honest, I make mistakes, I'd be the second to admit it.
> Think that's why I need her in my life, to check me when I'm trippin'
> on a mission tryna shift the culture. (Tuscan Leather)

As the second to admit his faults, Drake suggests that he needs to be taught first by his intimate relationships. His thoughtful self-reflection, the skill that informs how he can mobilise his own experiences in inspirational ways for his generation, depends on his personal connections. We can contrast this attitude to his reply in the same record to those in the rap scene: 'All of the talkin', got one reply for all of your comments / Fuck what you think, I'm too busy, that's why you leave a message.' He denies the influence of this public context on his self or his message.

Drake privileges his private relationships over the public ones established through his fame, but he does not act on that asserted assessment; he is influenced by aspects of hip hop public life – like wealth-flaunting and sexist language – that he claims not to value. DJ Kool Herc writes in his introduction to Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (2005) that

> [h]ip-hop is a family, so everybody has got to pitch in … We can't be hypocrites. That's what I hope the hip-hop generation can do, to take us all to the next level by always reminding us: It ain't about keeping real, it's about keeping it right. (Herc 2005, p. xiii)

Drake might want just to be himself, but the mediating role of rap as the communicative context for his thoughts and experiences changes the message in ways that he does not hold himself responsible for acknowledging.

As an artist, Drake is invested in making real and positive connections with his audience. As a public figure, he manages to come across as a decent and genuine person. However, he splits his real self from the conventions of hip hop, taking responsibility only for what he wants and blaming the context for the rest. Given his success, he could draw on his current position as a model of thoughtfulness and use the perception fans have of him to make real changes in what topics and values might be present in hip hop. Drake's focus on intimate relationships has the power to help redefine the kind of figure a male rapper might present in the hip hop context. As an influential figure for his generation, if he brought into the radius of his

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self-reflection a consciousness about and accountability for the context in which he is implicated, Drake could present new possibilities for masculine identity and open communication within respectful relationships. He is thoughtful about life, and about the process of turning life into art but, to be the model he expresses himself as, it would be necessary for Drake to also consider how art in turn affects lives again.

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