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1. [Intro]

Women continue to inhabit a subordinate position compared to men in the 21st century which is further perpetuated in and strengthened by popular media as bell hooks states: “Mass media ... continually reinscribes sexist thinking about gender roles” (*Writing Beyond Race* 35). In few genres of popular media is the patriarchal system more apparent than in rap music. Even though the woman is at times treasured as the queen, she is always positioned below the man, he is the god in the patriarchal system, thereby perpetuating gender issues (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 118; Kubrin and Weitzer, “Misogyny” 4; Lusane 359). However, differentiation is necessary in rap music with its different types; especially in hardcore and gangsta rap – its commercially most successful forms – women are often demeaned, insulted and verbally abused which reinforce negative stereotypes (Kitwana, “Challenge” 344). One of such an instance can be heard in Eminem’s “Rap God”: “But I got your mom deep-throatin’” (00:03:05-00:03:07). The woman in this verse is not active, she is rather used and used to make a statement about the rapper Eminem’s¹ god-like status in rap compared to his addressee, the addressee can do nothing in response and with this Eminem has the power. The same song finishes with the following verse, “Why be a king when you can be a god?” (00:05:56-00:05:59), which displays rap’s general understanding that men who can masterfully rap their rhymes are gods (Shusterman 477), and therefore above **everyone** else. However, its focus on the male perspective leaves out the women, their treatment and portrayal in rap which contributes to the perpetuation of women’s ‘lesser status.’ As rap does not see women on the same level as men (hooks, “Speech” 81), the verse could be reworded in order to include a more female-oriented perspective to highlight the issue of positioning women below men. As such it introduces the main topic of this thesis, gender in the two rap biopics *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*: “Why be a queen when you can be a god?”

The previous paragraph positions rap as a patriarchal-oriented popular media form where women are used as objects in rap songs, they are never those in power but rather symbols of powerlessness and weakness (Bucciferro 176). Why then would a white, heterosexual, feminist woman choose this topic? I have two answers for this question. The first answer is quite straightforward: Eminem has been my musical companion for many years now and is someone to whom I regularly return to when listening to hip hop music because the music empowers me. When Eminem raps: “So when I get back on my feet, don't wonder why in the/

¹ The name Eminem here is used to denote the rapper persona of Marshall Mathers. As Mickey Hess states: “Though based in autobiography, ‘Eminem’ becomes a character who acts out the violent impulses of his author” (*From Bricks* 65). As such, Eminem is viewed as the lyrical I, but distinct from the creator Marshall Mathers.

Fuck is my head in the clouds” (“Zeus” 00:01:07-00:01:11), I associate this with my life and the struggles I face and feel as if everything I set my mind to is possible if I believe in myself. The second answer is more complicated. Both Eminem and 50 Cent, who will be important in this thesis as well, have been condemned for their horrifying and demeaning treatment of women. Especially Eminem, by many regarded as one of the best rappers in the world (Nielson and Dennis 112), releases regularly music in which he describes killing, maiming, burying, abusing, raping and insulting women. One of the best examples for this would probably be his song “Kim” in which he fantasizes killing his ex-wife, finishing the rap with the following line: “Now bleed, bitch, bleed! Bleed, bitch, bleed! Bleed!” (00:04:44-00:04:52). For many listeners, “Eminem’s humor crossed the line of acceptability” (Kajikawa 136) because the victims of his songs’ attacks are people and groups of people that have to face such attacks regularly in their everyday lives. I do not condone such images conjured or words used, but for me they do not stand in the foreground when reflecting on why I listen to Eminem. It also helps me to move in a joyous way as the beats allow for impromptu dance parties to lift the spirits. The most important part for me is therefore the music with its beats to which I can dance, which helps me when I feel overwhelmed, or which I can just listen to when in need of some mental reinforcement.

Hip hop is a culture that is considered to have begun in the mid-1970s in the New York City borough of the South Bronx (Rose, *Black Noise* 2; Berry ix; Sullivan 605). The South Bronx is therefore the “home of the hip hop culture” (Rose, *Black Noise* 39) which developed into four pillars, in answer to its surrounding structures as well as to itself: graffiti, breakdance, DJ and rap (Androutsopoulos, “Einleitung” 10; Rose, *Black Noise* 27; Berry x). Especially graffiti and rap proved to be public opportunities of “counterpresence and voice” (Rose, *Black Noise* 59; Forman, “Introduction” 1) for the marginalized and forgotten youth of this African-American dominated culture who feel that this is the only way to express themselves (Grundmann 30; Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 135). Hip hop culture is furthermore characterized through its performative character in which the members of the community are both included as well as contributing participants to the different styles that are being developed in the culture (Androutsopoulos, “Einleitung” 12).

Rap is the branch of hip hop in which the musical style of rhyming to a beat is in the foreground (Vito 1) and which is said to have emerged as the last of the four elements comprising hip hop (Rose, *Black Noise* 51). The beat is generally provided by the DJ to which the master of ceremony (MC or emcee) raps their lines (Berry x); rapper, however, is the term that is most widely used in popular culture in order to talk about emcees. The culture of hip hop

itself was important for identity formation and for finding social status within a community, mainly due to the urban deindustrialization process during the 1970s which resulted in African-American communities facing extreme social and economic stresses and living in miserable conditions (Rose, *Black Noise* 25, 34; Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 266; Edwards 20; Winter 7). Rap was therefore used to deal with “significant historical conditions and the relationship between black Americans and the larger political and social character of America” (Rose, *Black Noise* 23). As such, early emcees saw rap as a “bridge to future endeavors in the broadcasting industry” (Forman, “Hip-Hop Ya Don’t Stop” 11) and not as the solution. However, rap before the 1980s did not have commercial strength – it was marginal music for the marginalized (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 14) – until it was ‘discovered’ by popular music institutions and garnered widespread attention within the next half decade (Rose, *Black Noise* 3; Light 139). The black youth subculture slowly started morphing into a black-dominated music with a white-dominated consumer culture (Samuels 147); by 1998 70 per cent of the 81 million records sold were bought by white youth (Vito 12). Alongside this development, the image that rap transported also changed: gangsta rap had arrived at the top (Berry 107). Because rap before the 1980s was thought to belong to the margins within the music scene, not a huge amount of attention was directed towards it, but with Sound Scan’s debut in 1991 the real share of the music market became apparent: rap had 12 per cent of the market, a higher number than expected (ibid.). Up to the late 1990s and the 21st century, gangsta and hardcore rap have garnered huge financial successes thanks to this consumer group – resulting in an increase of influence by record companies (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 221). Contrary to belief, whites did not leave rap after the initial “boom” – between 1995 and 2011 they amounted to 70 to 75 per cent of the customer base (4) and suburban white teenagers continue to consume hip hop (Erigha 120), proving that rap is highly relevant in the lives of American youth (Kitwana, “Hip-Hop Studies” 74) and “a thriving commercial entity” (“The Hip-Hop Generation” 118). This is problematic as the subject matter of gangsta rap songs mainly deals with the financial success of the individual by any means necessary (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 108; Baldwin 161), as well as with the “holy trinity of commercial hip hop – the black gangsta, pimp, and ho” (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 4), presenting therefore an undifferentiated view on women, masculinity, money and fame.

Rap in general focuses on representing black voices from marginalized urban regions (Rose, *Black Noise* 2), especially the uncomfortable truths of street life. According to Berry, the goal of these raps is to convince those listening to the beats and lines that the events really happened (33), however, even though the “successful performance of hip-hop authenticity is

one rooted in autobiography” (Hess, *From Bricks* 21) it fuses within this part of autobiography also fiction (8). As such, the listeners have to distinguish between the lyrical I (the persona or artist name) and the ‘real’ person behind the rapper (64), often resulting in difficulties in separating the ‘real’ person from the lyrical I (Urweider 322).

In gangsta rap the uncomfortable truths of street life are further exaggerated and focus on controversial topics, mainly on “violence, sex, drugs, alcohol, power, and money” (Edwards 10). This instance of rapping about ‘real events’ can also be called the ‘keeping it real’ attitude (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 137) and results in the perception by the audience of a high sense of authenticity of the rapper (136). Even with or rather because of the ‘keeping it real’ attitude, gangsta rap is exploitative in its meaning. On the one hand, “[w]omen are bitches, and bitches are whores and prostitutes” (169); male rappers, on the other hand, boast with their sexual promiscuity, brag by mentioning all the goods that they are able to buy with the money they make through rap (Sköld and Rehn 51) – the more is accrued the higher their “status and prowess” (Rose, *Black Noise* 132). Consequently, rap lives from the constant ‘fights’ for this status within the community which are carried out through elaborate rhymes (34; Verlan 140). Rapping skills are fundamental to these battles and involve “verbal mastery, mastery of delivery, creativity, personal style, and virtuosity” (Rose, *Black Noise* 163) performed with confidence on stage to establish oneself within the rap community (Androutsopoulos, “HipHop und Sprache” 111) – by presenting the **strong man**.

In order to be regarded as the strong man, rappers engage in various strategies: they present themselves as (1.) hyper-masculine by verbally dominating other men and women and (2.) they employ their body language in a manner so as to suggest dominance, desirability (through the hyper-sexualized body [Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 174]) and coolness, for example through the ‘cool pose’ (Vito 19). But not just the body can be used to underline the picture of the strong man, also (3.) the subject matter in which “nihilism, machismo, and violence” (47) are involved can serve this purpose. Many rappers employ the derogative terms ‘bitch’ or ‘faggot’ in order to signal that their opponents are inferior regarding their masculinity; they are feminized (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 108). Furthermore, street culture in which violence and gang activities are ubiquitous serves as a seal of ‘authenticity’ and strengthens the strong male persona (58). As such, the stories that the rappers tell through their songs “are perceived as ‘authentic black expression’” (55) and raise the issue of race and its perception by the white consumers. In hip hop, authenticity is therefore the main means of establishing some form of credibility and validates the rapper’s status; the characteristics that authenticity comprises of are “being black, male, hard, and from the streets” (Vito 17) – the culture is reconstructed as

all-black (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* xii). As such, gangsta rap and its glorification of violence and money by all means necessary affects stereotypes and general perceptions by the public regarding black people (37) – it contributes to the association of “black people with crime and violence” (93). As Tricia Rose further states in her book *The Hip Hop Wars*: “[W]hite consumers of hip hop ... wind up reinforcing problematic ideas about race, sexuality, class, and the state of urban America” (232).

This issue of perpetuating the image of the violent black man is visible in one of the objects of analysis – the rap biopic *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*. As a biopic, *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* ‘remediates’ and adapts the life of gangsta rapper 50 Cent. In general, the biopic belongs to the genre of the historical film and ‘docudrama’ in which the life of a famous person is re-told (Cartmell and Polasek 3). As the term ‘re-told’ already teases upon, biopics are not concerned with telling the complete truth of that famous person’s life, but is rather “a strange, hybrid entity, neither fish nor fowl, fiction nor nonfiction” (Croteau 211) – it wants to keep some mystery but needs to be based on and in reality (Bingham 7). Because it is necessarily “explicitly or implicitly engaged with adapting reality” (Corrigan 13), the protagonist of the biopic serves the purpose of becoming the main “source of desire and motivation” (Haiduc 26) for the audience. This short introduction of the biopic should already make clear that a precise definition of what a biopic is and what films belong into this category is difficult (Cartmell 93). The two objects of analysis, however, fulfil the most important criterion: they take the life stories of two successful and famous rappers – Eminem and 50 Cent – and turn these into (fictionalized) filmic versions.

The first film, released in 2002, is *8 Mile* (dir. Curtis Hanson) and stars Eminem as the aspiring emcee Jimmy ‘B-Rabbit’ Smith Jr. B-Rabbit faces three main problems on his path of becoming a rapper: The first problem concerns his skin color: B-Rabbit is a white man who tries to establish himself as an emcee within an African-American dominated scene and culture in which he is not welcome. The second problem concerns his stage fright: at the beginning of the film he fails to perform in the rap battle² in front of an audience, he ‘freezes,’ and loses the minimal respect he has within the rap community. The third problem belongs in the realm of his private life – he moves back in with his aimless and jobless mother and her abusive, younger boyfriend. As a result, he has to take care of his younger sister and, additionally, becomes attached to a young woman and wants to prove to her that his rapping skills are outstanding and he therefore deserves to be with her. The second film, released in 2005, is *Get Rich or Die*

² A battle is a competition in which two rappers try to prove their lyrical skills in front of the audience (Braidt 179; Alim et al. 117). Important in this is that the performers in a rap battle need to “reference their opponents’ rhymes” (Hess, *From Bricks* 45) to convince the viewers that the rhymes are spontaneous (44-45).

Tryin' (dir. Jim Sheridan) and stars 50 Cent as Marcus 'Young Cesar' Greer, a young drug dealer. At the beginning of the film Marcus is shot 9 times and, seeing his life flash past before his eye, the rest of the film recounts what he did to arrive at that point. At a young age he lost his drug-dealing but loving mother and moved in with his poor grandparents. As he becomes older, he realizes that the consumption of goods is important to his self-esteem – also to show to others what he has, and they don't – and he starts selling drugs. During this phase in his life, a girlfriend from his past moves back to his neighborhood and they start a relationship, and a family. Because he becomes a father, and survives the shots, he wants to change his life so that he can be there for his family, without the danger entailed with being a drug dealer. Rap is Marcus' means of changing his life, with the support of his manager, family and crew.

The emphasis of both films lies on the struggles and obstacles that the protagonists have to overcome in order to arrive at the top of the rap world (Quinn 3). However, the films should also be viewed with the information in mind that mainstream rap culture is obsessed with demeaning women as “bitches and hoes” (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 6). Whereas the first film keeps this ‘promise’ and the women in a submissive and dependent position, B-Rabbit's mother and sister are both cared for by him, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* portrays Marcus' mother and his girlfriend as strong and loving. These portrayals stand in contrast to the depictions of the male characters, therefore shedding light on the differences in portrayals of gender. To investigate these differences, I ask how masculinities and femininities are portrayed in the films *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*? The plural form of masculinity and femininity was chosen as both masculinities and femininities are social constructs which consist of a **multitude of behaviors** associated with male and female characters (Ćuk 138). Because the emphasis lies on the portrayal and therefore performance of masculinities and femininities, Judith Butler and her theory on gender as a performance is drawn upon (see *Gender Trouble*). According to Judith Butler, gender is socially constructed through performativity (*Gender Trouble* x) and aligns both dominant as well as non-dominant gender norms (*Undoing Gender* 209). By performativity Butler does not mean that it is performed once, but rather that a repetition of the ritual is necessary (*Gender Trouble* 173; Peberdy 27). Performativity denotes the action as a fabrication “manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs[, such as the body,] and other discursive means” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 173). Through the “naturalization in the context of a body” these repetitions achieve their effects (xv) – called the action of gender (178). But not only are the social aspects important, the cultural aspect of gender also needs to be highlighted (9). Gender does not have a fixed social and cultural meaning, but rather its meanings depend

on the historical contexts in which it is situated as well as its intersection with other, different aspects of identities (6).

Due to the films focusing on the two male stars, it will be interesting to analyze what different roles they perform throughout the film and, because commercial rap is infamous for demeaning women, it is important to concentrate on the portrayal of female characters as well. This is done in order to analyze in what way Hollywood cinema perpetuates the problematic depiction of femininity in gangsta and hardcore rap. With the intention of answering this question, I conduct a close reading of selected shots by relying on terminology used in feminist film studies, such as camera angle, type of shot, angle of the shot, lighting, and music, with an added emphasis on the gaze, such as Laura Mulvey introduced in her essays “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by ‘Duel in the Sun’ (King Vidor, 1946).” As bell hooks states: “There is power in looking” (“Oppositional Gaze” 519; *Black Looks* 105). For Laura Mulvey this is the central argument in her seminal essays; because the world is ordered according to the sexual binaries of male and female, the gaze of the spectator in cinema necessitates the same split of male/ active and female/ passive (“Visual Pleasure” 364) and results in the gaze of the spectator identifying with the male protagonist – he who actively contributes to the continuation of the story (365). Even though the gaze is criticized for its emphasis on the **male** gaze (Bennett et al. 255; hooks “Oppositional Gaze” 512), it is a very powerful focus of analysis, especially in the case of portrayal as it studies the framing of the characters and its signifiers. The gaze helps to place the viewer “with the hero” (Mulvey, “Afterthoughts” 13) – with the main character in the film. Thus, the gaze highlights how images of femininities and masculinities assume different meanings through their framing (Johnston 351), with the underlying assumption that both films cater to the male gaze as they belong to Hollywood cinema, which focuses on the masculine point of view (Mulvey, “Afterthoughts” 12; Nixon 314). The shots selected for the analysis portray a change of femininity or masculinity of the character to determine what – and if – change in femininity or masculinity is observable. In order to provide a basis for subsequent change(s), the first mise-en-scène in which the character in question is framed will be selected. This is then followed by later scenes in which a different aspect of femininity or masculinity is introduced. I understand mise-en-scène as Kolker does: It “refers to almost everything that goes into the composition of the shot” (qtd. in Bennett et al. 25).

Furthermore, I will ask how these portrayals of masculinity and femininity relate to hegemonic expectations about black masculinity. In this instance, Stuart Hall and his discussions on visual representation through stereotypes will be important, stereotypes are

“central to the representation of racial difference” (Hall, “Spectacle of ‘Other’” 247); as well as his contribution to understanding race as a ‘floating signifier’ (Hall, “Floating Signifier” 359).

The practice through which culture, and with it its ‘shared values,’ is produced is called ‘representation’ (Hall, “Introduction” xvii – xviii). The ‘shared values’ carry meaning for the members of the specific culture through the usage of various vehicles of media in which they function as symbols (xxi). For example, in western society the masculine is regarded as the norm, and functions, as a result of this, as a symbol (Gledhill and Ball 341): The masculine carries its meaning because it symbolizes specific meaning(s) of the accepted norm (Hall, “Introduction” xxi). Because it functions as the norm, it can also be said to represent the ideal, ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Ćuk 139). ‘Hegemonic masculinity’ encompasses a type of masculinity which is associated with “aggression [and] competitiveness” (Nixon 294) where specifically black masculinity signifies hypermasculinity (302). Within the system of representation, the opposite of the masculine is the feminine – a distinction according to binary oppositions, which, according to Hall, is a “rather crude and reductionist way of establishing meaning” (“Spectacle of ‘Other’” 225), namely stereotypes. Stereotypes are representational practices where the relation between the signifier and the signified is fixed by cultural expectations of the members of the culture (215; “Work of Representation” 16), such as the aspects mentioned above on hegemonic masculinity. In the specific case of the black body, seen as physically strong, sexually exceptional, but also primitive and violent (Mercer and Julien qtd. in Hall, “Spectacle of ‘Other’” 251, 229), the hegemonic expectations reduce the black body to one homogenous group (234). For the stereotype of the hypermasculine black body, the body is used as a surface on which the meanings of power and knowledge by the different institutions are inscribed (Hall, “Work of Representation” 35), therefore constructing the body as the main means of meaning-making within this system of representation (Hall, “Introduction” xix). These representations need to be interpreted in order to be understood but are not the end point of any analysis as they necessitate always further interpretations (Hall, “Work of Representation” 27).

The black body in rap is a stereotype with attributes of crime, violence, sexual domination as well as drug dealing that are regularly performed and confirmed by gangsta rappers' performances themselves (Nielson and Dennis, 43; Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 13). Black masculinity is therefore connected with and performed through the body (Berry 123). The association and stereotyping of “blacks with ignorance, sexual deviance, violence, and criminality” (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 39) is continued and results in many white listeners becoming familiar with only these black rappers and neighborhoods (54). The male black body

is important in the hip hop culture, yet the female (black) body is likewise stereotyped. The male body is reinforced by the rappers through their songs, in which the construction of the women as “objects and status symbols” (Rose, *Black Noise* 104) is further strengthened and sustained. According to Tricia Rose, in hip hop rappers “regularly use women as props that boost male egos, treat women’s bodies as sexual objects, and divide women into groups that are worthy of protection and respect and those that are not” (*Hip Hop Wars* 119). As a result, traditional views on gender as well as on sexuality are reinforced by hip hop musicians through the employment of stereotypes that are repeatedly performed in the songs (Vito 4).

Hip hop is not only known for its abusive and demeaning treatment of women, but is also, through its history, an African-American cultural form (Kajikawa 20), which does not make it easy for people from other backgrounds to become accepted. Consequently, not only is it necessary to analyze femininities and masculinities but also race and with it the intersectionality between these aspects. As Crenshaw states in her keynote speech in 2016, intersectionality is a term used to draw attention towards the overlap of different forms of discrimination based on, for example, race and gender/ sex (00:06:01-00:06:17). Furthermore, (economic) class is another important intersectional aspect, which influences how rap deals with masculinities and femininities – the more money a rapper owns, the higher his status within the rap community. How do forms of masculinity and femininity in the films *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* intersect with race and class constructions? Race regarded as a biologically given aspect has its roots in the science of the 19th century and is continued to be used by racists today (Fanon 35; Michaels 28; Kajikawa 6), making racism “one of the most profoundly ‘naturalized’ of existing ideologies” (Hall, “Whites of their Eyes 101) which – through its dominant position within the public discourse – obscures “the way in which class differences disrupt notions of racial unity” (hooks, *Writing Beyond Race* 2). According to Walter Benn Michaels, the persistence of race and the fight against racism helps in overshadowing the need for economic equality before cultural equality (17). However, whilst race, and also class, are connected to classificatory systems by which humans order and categorize their surrounding world (Hall, “Floating Signifier” 359), race should rather be understood as a social construct which is dependent on its (historical) context (Kajikawa 4). Race is therefore a ‘floating signifier’ (see Hall, “Floating Signifier”) in which its meaning is always in flux. This results in blackness in hip hop as being understood as a signifier “mediated through sound, material culture, and the visual as well as through personal performance” (White 22) with preconceived notions of blackness as gangsta (Fanon 35; Kajikawa 136). Furthermore, even though rap is positioned as culturally black, the meaning of blackness depends on the artist as well as on the

song (Kajikawa 143). According to White, the performance of masculinity and race is privileged within rap as the “same set of signifiers” (2) is used by both African-American and white rappers in order to construct “models of self and identity” (ibid.), making rap an important cultural location of race and masculinity. In this sense, “rap persists as a category of identity that rap musicians negotiate in presenting themselves to the public” (Kajikawa 148). This is especially interesting as white artists, such as Eminem, had (and have) to prove continuously that they deserve recognition in the rap world. Within the film *8 Mile* B-Rabbit is the white person trying to fit into the African-American dominated culture form and he therefore has to prove that he is deserving of the respect of his peers. At the same time, B-Rabbit is aware of him belonging to the lower class, he is ‘white trash.’ Another white rapper appears in *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*, called Dangerous, who does not need to prove his worth to his peers, he is rather being used to show what can be achieved with and through the gangsta lifestyle. As such, Dangerous is the messenger whereas B-Rabbit is the fighter as he needs to gain the community’s respect. As a result, an analysis of scenes needs to take into account aspects of race (black or white) as well as class (for example ‘white trash’).

In summary, my thesis investigates the portrayal of gender, race and class, showing that within the rap biopics the image of the strong (black) male is perpetuated by focusing on hegemonic masculinity and the women are presented as support of the male character or in need of care.

In order to answer my research questions, the thesis consists of five chapters that try to emulate the form of a rap song. The main chapters focus on answering the research questions by analyzing scenes from the films. As the films are situated in hip hop culture, the titles of the analysis chapters will employ quotes by rap songs of the films and soundtracks so that the form of the rap song is imitated as close as possible. The titles of the chapters are chosen so that the quotes already reflect the topic of the respective chapter.

The first chapter will detail the two films and their content. As the films can be considered fictionalized autobiographies, the lives of the two stars playing the roles of the protagonist, Eminem as B-Rabbit and 50 Cent as Marcus, need to be outlined to allow for a better understanding of the chosen narratives concerning the protagonists. The second chapter will then focus on analyzing the forms of masculinity and the intersections with race and class present in the films. So as to enable a better comparison between the films, the analysis will be carried out based on the ‘size’ of the characters. First, the protagonists and their masculinities will be analyzed, then their antagonists on the way to success. These scenes will be selected according to the masculinities present and – should race or class play an important factor – will

include the analysis of the intersection as well. The third chapter will focus on the femininities present within the films – and will also include the intersection of femininities, race and class. First, the scenes introducing and showing the characters of the love interests are analyzed, followed by the – to the protagonists – important mother figures.

2. [Bridge] “America got a thing for this gangsta shit, they love me:” The films and the artists

This thesis is concerned with two film productions that especially focus on rap music and its respective protagonist. This chapter will therefore introduce the genre of the biopic and then outline the content of the films and the connections between the content and the biographies of Eminem and 50 Cent – the actors of the protagonists.

Film, which emerged in the late nineteenth century and has a long and varied history, saw an important innovation in 1927 – audio was introduced to the medium, making film audio-visual (Bennett et al. 14; Villarejo 2). The two productions in focus for this thesis, fulfil the common construction of storytelling within Hollywood: The typical structure, called ‘Hollywood narrative form,’ tells the story of the film in a linear narrative that centers on a single protagonist (Benshoff and Griffin 27). This focus results in the ‘hero’ working towards a definitive objective within the linear narrative (Miller 152): “the central character desires something, seeks to achieve something” (Speidel 84), which is true for *8 Mile* – B-Rabbit wants to become a respected emcee – and *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* – Marcus wants to use rap to leave the illegal world behind him – they are both examples of the ‘Hollywood narrative form.’ With the narrative, the presentation of information and response of the audience to the film is controlled, and we, as the audience, are positioned alongside the protagonist in **his** quest of achieving **his** goal (Bennett et al. 58, 60). The use of the male pronoun is deliberate as Hollywood films privilege the **male** protagonist in the narrative. **He** drives the action and the ‘hero’ therefore associates men with the active role (Benshoff and Griffin 203, 251; Villarejo 150) whereas the female roles, supporting the male protagonist, are “acted upon” (Bennett et al. 255), they represent the passive role who does not further the story, they are “objects of others’ stares” (Snead 18). As common in Hollywood films, the (unconscious) patriarchal structure of the narrative results in the female characters solely representing male desire (Kaplan 120), drawing similarities with the treatment of women within the commercial rap scene as “sexual objects intended exclusively for male pleasure” (Dyson, “Culture of Hip-Hop” 65-66).

The focus on the man is especially true for the ‘biopic’ – the latest and most popular biopics being Freddie Mercury’s *Bohemian Rhapsody* (dir. Bryan Singer) of 2018, Elton John’s *Rocketman* (dir. Dexter Fletcher) of 2019 and Elvis Presley’s biopic *Elvis* (dir. Baz Luhrmann), released in 2022. In these, as well as in the two objects of analysis, a significant **male** person’s life is dramatized. However, contrary to popular belief, biopics consist of more fiction than fact

as they necessarily need to protect the person's reputation and myth (Cartmell and Polasek 3-4). The biopics at the center of the thesis confirm this, even though the films focus on a pivotal moment (Cartmell 95) in Eminem's as well as 50 Cent's life, "a brief but significant period" (Hobbs 416) in showing the struggles that they had to face, they (necessarily) change elements to the story. As such, the biopic does not simply recount the individual's life (Bingham 7), but focuses on displaying the 'genius' of the protagonist (Polasek 311) in achieving their aims, thereby indicating their extraordinariness. As will become clearer when discussing the content of the films and the lives that they drew inspiration from, *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* belong to the category of the semifictional biopic (Haiduc 39) – inventing (and changing) certain aspects within the life stories of the protagonists.

Because the focus in *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* lies on Eminem and 50 Cent in their respective roles as B-Rabbit and Marcus, they are the center of attention regarding their talent in rap with which they need to overcome the obstacles in their way to becoming respected rappers within the rap community or music industry (Bingham 7), fulfilling the 'Great Man' biopic characteristic (22). Interestingly, the darker side of America's society is shown in the films – the poor people living in a desolate city, and drugs – confirming 50 Cent's statement: "America got a thing for this gangsta shit, they love me" ("Hustler's Ambition" 00:00:21-00:00:24). Especially in Hollywood the tendency is to fund (black) movies containing comedy, action or **violence** (Erigha 115). Both commercial hip hop and Hollywood films deal with topics of crime, violence and sexual deviance and drive with these issues "the racial subtext of white consumption" (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 229). However, not only these negative aspects are highlighted, by focusing on B-Rabbit's and Marcus' desire to achieve the 'American Dream' the films promote "American national identity" (Epstein, "Intro" 2) as individualistic, real and strong (Dimitriadis 431) – comparable to the men representing this type of identity.

2.1. "An MC's worst dream, I make 'em tense" – *8 Mile* and Eminem

8 Mile (dir. Curtis Hanson) is set in Detroit in 1995 and follows one week in the life of Jimmy 'B-Rabbit' Smith Jr. (Eminem). The name of the film pays homage to the 8 Mile Road, which Eminem himself calls "the racial borderline" (Hasted 9) – a road which separates the black, poor area in Detroit from the white suburbs (Kajikawa 119). The first scene already shows what the film is mainly about, namely rapping and making a name for oneself within the hip hop community. B-Rabbit wants to become a famous emcee, together with his crew Three One Third (a wordplay on the Detroit area code 313), which consists of his best friends Future

(Mekhi Phifer), Sol (Omar Benson Miller), DJ Iz (De'Angelo Wilson) and Cheddar Bob (Evan Jones). However, during his first battle at The Shelter, where Future hosts the rap battles, B-Rabbit is unable to perform in front of the hostile crowd and loses out on Lil' Tic (Proof). Not only does the audience not support him, but they also actively chant "Choke!" (00:08:24-00:08:48) – mainly due to him being white and therefore not welcome in the black-dominated scene, "you don't belong you're a tourist" (00:07:23-00:07:26). B-Rabbit loses by default as he is unable to rap in the face of such aggression. After his loss, he takes the bus back to his mother's home. He has just broken up with his girlfriend Janeane (Taryn Manning) and therefore does not have a place to stay. At the trailer park where his mother lives, he enters the trailer, but upon seeing his mother, Stephanie (Kim Basinger), having sex with her boyfriend Greg (Michael Shannon) in the living room, he leaves again and waits outside. His mother is ultimately okay with B-Rabbit staying at her place for a few weeks, but after him and Greg fighting, she also tells him that he needs to get along with her boyfriend as she is relying on Greg receiving his insurance settlement (Greg was in a car accident) with which her money problems would be over. Having woken up his younger sister Lily (Chloe Greenfield) with the fight, B-Rabbit takes her back to bed whilst singing to her a little self-invented lullaby.

The next day he wants to use the car Stephanie gifted to him the night before, but the car does not start and he has to take the bus to work. On his way he talks with a friend, Wink (Eugene Byrd), who promises him studio time as he himself is on the way up in the music industry in Detroit. At the factory, B-Rabbit talks to the manager as he would like more shifts, but is shut down quickly, and meets his love interest for the week, Alex (Brittany Murphy), who is looking for her brother at the factory. After his shift, he and Future try to repair his car so that he can use it to drive to work. Whilst doing this, they hear Greg singing to "Sweet Home Alabama" and start freestyling to the song themselves – the film shows here the first real instance of B-Rabbit's rap skills. As they were able to repair the car, B-Rabbit and his crew drive around during the night, partying and generally enjoying themselves. In a club, B-Rabbit again sees Alex and they start a conversation – indicating they are both interested in the other person. In the same night, drunk and high on drugs, the friends drive to an old, abandoned building which was the site of a raping, and burn it down.

At home again, B-Rabbit is seen cleaning and watching his sister when his mother comes home with an eviction note in her hand as she missed the payments on the trailer. She and B-Rabbit have a short fight as he criticizes her for not actively looking for a job and relying only on Greg.

Next, he and his crew drive around aimlessly, until B-Rabbit sees Papa Doc and his crew Leadaz of Tha Free World and starts a fight which escalates as Cheddar pulls out a gun. Everyone is able to defuse the situation, however, Cheddar shoots himself in the leg as he puts the gun away and the Three One Third crew drive to the hospital. There, Future and Wink start fighting, because Future regards Wink as someone who only talks, but cannot back it up with actions. B-Rabbit leaves exasperated and returns home.

The next day, Sol picks him up and drops him off at work as his car does not work. At lunch, a female worker, Vanessa, starts rapping about her displeasure of work. This then turns into a battle when a male worker starts to insult the other workers and B-Rabbit answers with his own lines. All of this is watched by Alex, who then congratulates B-Rabbit on his rap, and the two of them sneak away to have sex. In the evening, B-Rabbit comes home and sees both Wink and Alex talk with his mother and sister in their trailer, and because he is ashamed of living with his mother, he leaves. Wink follows him and tells him about an opportunity at WJLB Radio Station which could help B-Rabbit get his demo heard, and maybe even result in a contract. After this, everything comes together and pushes B-Rabbit over the edge. First, he is confronted by Greg about the eviction note, ending in a fight between them as Greg pushes Stephanie against the table and B-Rabbit retaliating. Second, B-Rabbit fights with Future as his best friend signed him up for the next battle at The Shelter, taking place the day after, without B-Rabbit's permission. Third, B-Rabbit decides to drive to WJLB, but instead of receiving the chance to show his demo, he sees Alex and Wink have sex and punches Wink out of hurt and frustration. Fourth, at home he is cornered and beaten by Leadaz of Tha Free World, whilst a helpless Lily watches from the trailer. However, instead of interpreting these instances as signs for him to stop, he uses his anger and goes to The Shelter to battle. He even has a fellow worker cover his shift, as his manager finally gives him extra hours. During his battles at The Shelter, he wins every single one – finally earning the respect of the rap community. Even though his crew is jubilant and already talks about the deals that they will get after his performance, B-Rabbit stays realistic and goes back to work: “I think I kinda just need to do my own thing, man” (01:44:40-01:44:43). With him walking alone through the streets and the song “Lose Yourself” playing, the film ends.

As *8 Mile* belongs to the category of the semifictional biopic, numerous parallels can be drawn between B-Rabbit and Eminem. Similar to B-Rabbit, Eminem had to work hard in order to gain the respect and acknowledgement of the hip hop community. This was mainly due to Eminem, and therefore also B-Rabbit, being white and, resulting from this, black people within the culture feared that the contribution and participation of white people would dilute and steal

this black cultural movement (Rose, *Black Noise* 5). In hip hop, the ‘keeping it real’ aspect, seen as the ultimate truth teller of poor, urban life of black people, enjoys widespread acceptance (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 134; Neal, “No Time” 57) but was misused by the first white rapper to ‘break through’ in rap: Vanilla Ice. Vanilla Ice had invented part of his background so as to fulfil the ‘keeping it real’ criterion of the ‘hood,’ and ultimately this was the reason for his downfall within hip hop. Due to Vanilla Ice’s lies, other white rappers had it more difficult in garnering respect in rap music (Mathers 22). Eminem took a different path, he took his whiteness and presents it as “marginalized, frustrated, angry, and at times even abject” (Kajikawa 142), making it clear that he does not want to ‘steal’ the music from African-Americans but that he wants to participate (134). He was successful in this and is now considered to be the first white superstar in hip hop (Grundmann 30).

Eminem, a constructed name for the hip hop community (Patrick 288), was born in 1972 as Marshall Bruce Mathers III (Mathers 126; Hasted 18) and grew up with his impoverished mother, Debbie Mathers, in and around Detroit (Hasted 2). The impoverishment, also shown in the film, is exacerbated by Debbie Mathers and Stephanie not working: “My mother never had a job”, is Marshall Mathers’ statement on this issue (22). The exact date of birth is not known for B-Rabbit, but both Marshall Mathers and B-Rabbit seem to be around the same age as they try to overcome the odds in rap in 1995 (Watts, “Border Patrolling” 188). Furthermore, both seem to have no relationship with their respective fathers (Hasted 39). Contrary to what is shown in the film, Marshall Mathers and his mother moved often, which added to Marshall’s social anxiety, “I tried to be social. To fit in” (Mathers 143), but he never felt too comfortable making friends as he could never be sure when they would move again. However, all of this changed when he was introduced to hip hop and started to rap himself: “Hip-hop made me feel like I was on a team. I felt like I was not only representing people who had my back, but also connecting them to each other” (205). Especially important for his ‘entry’ into the rap scene was his friendship to Proof (7) who introduced him to the rap battles at The Hip Hop Shop where he performed as Eminem: “The stage was like a boxing ring. If you won, you were the heavyweight champion” (169). Here the next parallel between Marshall Mather’s life and B-Rabbit becomes apparent, both regard battle rapping as a boxing match and both struggled with ‘performance anxiety’ (Watts, “Border Patrolling” 194), as Marshall Mathers recalls one battle: “In the last round, I hit him with all my punch lines – then I choked” (27). With Proof, Marshall Mathers had a path into the African-American dominated rap scene, making him able to prove his skills as an emcee (Mathers 18) even though he still faced huge obstacles due to the Vanilla Ice controversy. Similar to B-Rabbit, Eminem competed in battles at The Hip Hop Shop (169)

but nevertheless struggled to provide for his family until he was discovered by Dr. Dre around 1999 (41), beginning his life as one of the greatest rappers (Edwards x). Regarding his family, one major diversion is visible: B-Rabbit takes care of his little sister Lily, whereas in Marshall Mathers' life he took care of his little brother Nathan (Eminem, "Cleanin' Out My Closet" 00:03:31-00:03:34) and his daughter Hailie. A possible explanation for this swap could be that it makes the distinction between B-Rabbit and Mathers clearer. The film does not continue with depicting B-Rabbit's life once he wins his first rap battle, but rather leaves the ending open. B-Rabbit could continue with his work at the factory and never make it out of Detroit, or, similar to Eminem, he could compete at several different battles until he receives a deal after years of struggle.

As Slim Shady, the alter ego of Eminem, Marshall Mathers became famous – both for his skills in releasing intricate verses (Edwards 66) as well as the subject matter in which he attacks every institution, from the government and the president to the police as well as society and its hypocrisy in dealing with issues such as racism and gun violence (Grundmann 30-31), but mainly women (Serrano ch. 1999) – polarizing the public in the process. His way to success and fame restored "the myth of the American Dream" (Watts, "Border Patrolling" 201), the American way of self-creation and self-realization (Hasted 14). His alter ego Slim Shady was a representation of the cold-blooded psycho-killer, who especially focuses on killing, maiming and brutally abusing women (Kajikawa 136), and garnered notoriety within the public and rap scene: "An MC's worst dream, I make 'em tense" (Eminem, "Rabbit Run" 00:02:20-00:02:22). Kajikawa states that the use of violence and misogyny in Eminem's rap songs function as a way of contesting with African-American gangsta rappers (135). He was frequently attacked by representatives of the government as well as parent groups and activists of the LGBTQI+ community, to which Eminem responded: "I don't think music can make you kill or rape someone, any more than a movie is going to make you do something you know is wrong ... It [music] can help make them [, the listeners and public] respect their individuality ..." (Hasted 36). Nevertheless or because of these subject matters, the controversy of Slim Shady and his film *8 Mile*, Eminem was able to draw a considerable and diverse number of fans (Hester-Williams par. 13; Patrick 282; Mathers 119). Interestingly, the film does not show variations of Marshall Mather's alter egos with their violence and misogyny, but rather focuses on showcasing the skills needed to hold ones own in hip hop. As a result, Eminem is not only associated with his polarizing raps but also with B-Rabbit and his quest for acceptance within the rap scene.

2.2. “I got shot up but I got up and I'm back at it again” – *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* and 50 Cent

8 Mile was released in 2002, with *Get Rich Or Die Tryin'* (dir. Jim Sheridan) following three years after that in 2005 and depicts the life of Marcus ‘Young Cesar’ Greer (Curtis ‘50 Cent’ Jackson III): from drug dealer to gangsta rapper. The name of the film already connects the fictional life of Marcus with that of 50 Cent, as his debut rap album carries the same name. In contrast to *8 Mile*, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* follows Marcus from age six to his early 20s, thereby covering several years in his life.

The film starts with the adult Marcus sitting in a car with his friends on the way to a Colombian money house that they want to rob. With him is his crew: Bama (Terrence Howard), Justice (Tory Kittles) and Keryl (Omar Benson Miller – who also starred in *8 Mile*). Because they do not find large notes, solely \$5 and \$10, Bama gets nervous during the robbery and threatens the Colombian people with his gun, shooting a man in the leg. After this, Marcus intervenes and all of them flee with the money when two further persons emerge from the safe with guns. Luckily, no one else is hurt and they drive to a parking space where they burn the car used in the robbery and leave in their own respective ones. Initially Marcus wants to drive somewhere else, but the fourth member of the crew, Antwan (Ashley Walters), warns him of the police and he drives to his grandparents’ house. There he is shot several times. Without knowing his fate, the movie moves to Marcus’ childhood to show what Marcus did to arrive at that point in his life.

The first scene shows Marcus and his mother, Katrina (Serena Reeder) driving together in her car, singing happily to a song. As his mother is a drug dealer, which Marcus is aware of, he often spends time at his grandparents’ home where he goes out with his friends, Antwan and Charlene (Joy Bryant), raps and has a good time. Once, he is in the car with his mother when she sees a dealer selling his drugs in her area and she angrily confronts the dealer. They start fighting and Marcus gets out of the car with a stick to protect her. This is not necessary, though, as another dealer, Majestic (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje), intervenes. Marcus’ life is good at this point. However, one day two tragic events change his life. As ‘Young Cesar’ Marcus recorded a sexually explicit rap song for Charlene, he wants to show her that likes her, and Charlene’s stepfather finds the tape. Due to its explicit nature, Charlene has to move to her grandparents as her parents want to keep her from Marcus. On the same day, his mother is killed and burned in her house, making Marcus an orphan at twelve years old.

As Marcus does not know who his father is, he moves in with his grandparents where he has to share everything with his uncles and aunts. This is difficult for him because his mother

always made sure that he had everything he wanted. He does not cope well with the cramped conditions in the house and moves into the basement where he at least has his own space. This is also the moment he decides to start dealing drugs, he wants to be able to buy the newest sneakers. This comes to Majestic's attention, who takes him under his wing and provides him with drugs to sell. After this event in his life, the film jumps forward several years with Marcus older, but still at school and selling drugs. One day at school drugs are found in his possession and he is fined \$500 dollars. This he takes as an incentive to move out and rent his own place where he does not have to hide who he is: "I'm a gangsta, grandpa, and I'm proud of it" (00:25:05-00:25:07).

Everything changes when the drug dealers start producing crack, and Marcus forms his own crew to sell it: he, Antwan, Justice and Keryl. The crew works hard, especially because a good work ethic and the ensuring money is important to Marcus, but the situation in the neighborhood becomes tense as Colombians and blacks fight each other for spots to sell drugs on. The emergence of crack, and its affordability, increased the chances for drug dealers to amass wealth, but with it also "drug-gang turf wars" (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 46). With a truce, the situation calms down and Marcus' crew earns enough money so that he can buy a white Mercedes to show off his success: "I can't wait for the others to see me in this" (00:37:44-00:37:46). With his car he drives to a music label and gives his demo to an executive to listen to – showing that Marcus has not completely given up on being a rapper. From this moment on, many events happen that change the direction of Marcus' life: He meets Charlene again with whom he starts a relationship, Antwan is shot and paralyzed whilst out partying with the crew, Majestic starts to move against the boss of the black drug operation, Levar Cahill (Bill Duke), and Marcus has to go to prison as drugs are found during a raid in his home. In prison he meets his future manager, Bama, who encourages him to follow his dream of being a rapper, which Marcus' starts to seriously pursue as Charlene tells him that she is pregnant. With this he realizes that he wants to be present in his family's life, without fear of going to prison or being shot. Upon being released, Majestic offers him the position of second-in-command in the drug operation that he took over from Levar, but Marcus turns him down. This makes Majestic believe that he is working for and with Levar to overthrow him. However, Marcus has no plans to do this as he prepares with Charlene for the arrival of their baby and his emergence as a rapper. The relationship between Majestic and Marcus becomes contentious and Marcus records two diss songs³ – one attacking Dangerous (Michael Miller), the white rapper of

³ A diss song is often used in battles where the rapper insults their opponent. Here the main objective is to damage the opponent's reputation through wordplay (Berry 33).

Majestic, and one against Majestic himself. Majestic orders a hit on Marcus and Bama as they refuse to apologize and after the robbery Marcus is shot several times by his friend Justice, who secretly worked as a spy for Majestic. This is also the scene that the film used to flash back to Marcus' childhood.

Marcus survives and begins his rehabilitation at the beach house but is depressed and lost. After an ultimatum by Charlene, he again starts to work out and rap. His crew, minus Justice, girlfriend and manager help him create a demo that is sold in the neighborhood. The demo is successful and a concert in Majestic's territory is planned. Before the concert starts, Majestic visits Marcus and admits to killing Marcus' mother. Marcus punches Majestic in rage but can be calmed down before killing him and walks towards the stage entrance. Majestic tries to attack Marcus with a knife but is shot and killed by Bama which enables Marcus to walk out on stage as a free man – starting his rap career.

Whereas *8 Mile* follows its protagonist for one week, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* shows several years in the life of the protagonist, Marcus, and is also more accurate in depicting 50 Cent's life compared to Eminem's in *8 Mile*. In contrast to Eminem, 50 Cent did not struggle to gain acceptance within hip hop, mainly due to him being black and having "lived the stereotypical inner-city lifestyle" (Davis 26) thereby embodying the typical gangsta rapper striving for material gain and consumption (Kajikawa 112). As such 50 Cent, a constructed name (Patrick 288) that should be understood "as a metaphor of change" (50 Cent, *Pieces to Weight* 164), is both through his name and career "a metaphor for the ruthless profit-seeking and seductive pleasures of capitalism" (Kajikawa 116) through which he was able to leave his impoverished circumstances behind (Davis 7). Through the semifictional biopic the only seemingly authentic, but in reality, glamorized and ghettoized culture of black Americans in popular media (Tyree 121) shows "highly seductive portraits of street hustling," (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 141) poverty, drugs and violence (Collins 4) in which individualism and personal success stand in the foreground (Hall and hooks, 113; Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 107).

50 Cent was born in 1975 to his fifteen-year-old mother, Sabrina, as Curtis James Jackson III (50 Cent, *Pieces to Weight* 7). His mother was a drug dealer, exactly as Marcus' mother Katrina. Both the protagonist, and the real person he is based on, were aware of their mothers' profession from a young age onwards (9). However, instead of raising him, Sabrina had Curtis Jackson grow up with his grandparents in Queens, New York (9; Cullum 18) – a difference to the film in which he mainly lives with his mother and only stays from time to time at his grandparents' home. At the age of eight Curtis Jackson's mother is murdered and results in him being raised by her parents – three years earlier than in *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (50 Cent,

Pieces to Weight 13). The borough of Queens was at that time already very involved in the drug business, and Curtis Jackson therefore had regularly contact with people working as drug dealers – many of them his relatives – and began to see them as his role models, especially concerning money, combining entrepreneurship with drug dealing (25; Brereton 51; Sköld and Rehn 55): “The only thing that mattered to me was making money, because money seemed to be the answer to all my problems” (50 Cent, *Pieces to Weight* 46).

Aged only eleven, he starts selling drugs, again earlier by some time than in the film, and stays in the business of drugs for more than a decade (29). During his time as a drug dealer the lucrative market of crack emerged (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 48), enabling the impoverished families to receive some income, even though drugs were and are illegal (McCann 92). The main incentive behind dealing drugs was for the dealers to ‘look good,’ to be able to buy and display the clothes and shoes that signaled status within the community; profit was the main “measure of worth” (Quinn 7). Especially cars were important in achieving this goal (Davis 54) and Curtis Jackson, as well as Marcus, bought/ buy a “twenty-thousand-dollar SUV” (50 Cent, *Pieces to Weight* 138) as a young man to show the success possible with drugs (35).

Selling drugs is dangerous, not just in the neighborhood due to fights between crews but also regarding the law. In the film Marcus is caught twice in possession of drugs; once he is fined and the second time he has to go to prison for a few months. Curtis Jackson, however, had more contact with the police throughout the time he dealt drugs and, additionally to him becoming a father, he began looking for alternatives to earning money (163). This is the moment that hip hop enters Jackson’s life; contrary to Marcus he didn’t have interest in rapping before seeing it as a means of escape. He began to practice rapping and writing songs, coming up with his name ‘50 Cent.’ During this time of establishing himself as a rapper within hip hop, he got into a conflict with another rapper, Ja Rule. On 24th of May 2000 Curtis Jackson was shot nine times – once in the face, once in the hand and the remaining seven times in the legs (Baker ch. 15; 50 Cent, *Pieces to Weight* 2; Hasted 197; Berry 120) with a potential connection between the conflict of Ja Rule and the shooting never proven. Like Marcus in *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* he survives and begins in earnest to rap: “I got shot up but I got up and I’m back at it again” (50 Cent, “Places to Go” 00:01:02-00:01:05). For the next few years, he builds his persona and audience, releasing in February 2003 his debut album *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* – one of the most successful rap albums that sold 12 million copies (Serrano ch. 2003; Brereton 51) – with which he starts his brand as a gangsta rapper (Hasted 197). The promotion of his gangsta rapper brand focuses on and glorifies the violent experiences he made as a drug dealer, profitable due to the interest in criminal life especially by young white consumers, and enhances

his credibility in turn (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 15, 57, 136; Hess, *From Bricks* 62). Especially the cover of his first album highlights 50 Cent's representation as a "brutal black man" (Hasted 197): Postured in the hypermasculine 'cool pose' the cover shows him topless, with his muscles and tattoos on display, objectifying and sexualizing him in the process (Berry 123; Hasted 197) which offers a clear connection to the cover of the film where he poses topless as well.

Not just through the usage of his body, also with the subject matter he emphasizes his gangsta rapper identity; he "brag[s] about controlling women like pimps, being stylish like pimps, and about being pimps" (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 168) contributing to hip hop culture's sexist, misogynistic and patriarchal stance (Dyson, *Between God* xii). Unfortunately, these instances result in the stereotyping of gangsta rappers as 'thugs' and associates black men with this image – "a vision developed in fear and paranoia" (5) that contributes to the continued belief that black people are "more likely to express anger with violence" (hooks, *Writing Beyond Race* 16).

However, Curtis Jackson did and does not just want to further his career as a rapper but rather sees hip hop as a means of establishing a multipronged business – changing the way that rap approaches business opportunities (Baker ch. 15). The main effect of this was the commercializing of rap with the specific blackness of the gangsta that addresses the young, white and male consumers (Berry 109). With this mindset, Curtis Jackson was able to leave the streets behind and transformed himself into the rap mogul 50 Cent (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 47), a step which is left open in the film where Marcus celebrates his first success on stage, but his further future is kept uncertain.

3. [Verse 1] “This world is mine for the taking, make me king:” masculinist fantasies of dominance, race and class

Within the rap community and the commercial field of rap music, 50 Cent and Eminem achieved significant success which allows both considerable power and influence over the genre: “The world is mine for the taking, make me king” (Eminem, “Love Yourself” 00:02:03-00:02:05). The path to success for B-Rabbit and Marcus, however, entails different forms of masculinities. In the films they are the center of attention and, throughout the respective motion picture, portray different masculinities thereby necessitating a discussion of the term ‘masculinities.’

The singular term ‘masculinity’ is a social construct used to define male social roles (Akthar and Hynes 118; Brod and Kaufman 4), whereas the use of the plural form draws attention towards the aspect of performance that is needed to fulfil the expectations and constructions of male social roles present within society (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv; Nixon 295; Peberdy 4; Glapka, “Masculinity” 3). As such, the aspect of performance points towards an understanding of gender as being socially constructed, continuously performed and in flux (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv; Coltrane 43; Adams and Savran 4): The male gender is “an act and social construction ... of gendered acts and male social roles” (Peberdy 19) that need to be repeated and depend on the body (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv). This performance of gender by way of the ascribed social roles constitutes both gender and the body.

Masculinities themselves are diverse, with society viewing heterosexual masculinity as the norm that should be strived for – the norm thereby governs the manner of performed gender that is acceptable to and in society (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xx). As such, masculinities are highly changeable depending on the society in which they are performed and repeated in, within the set norms (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 10). The norm regarding masculinity denotes the reproduction of dominant positions of power and wealth over other men and women (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxviii; Carrigan et al. 112; Ibaseta 68) and is called ‘hegemonic masculinity.’

Undifferentiated ‘hegemonic masculinity’ privileges physical characteristics of strength, control, emotional independence, rationality as well as endurance (Nixon 315; Akthar and Hynes 119; Alderson 201), however, further characteristics are added when talking about the black body’s masculinity: it represents the “promise of wildness, of unlimited physical prowess and unbridled eroticism” (hooks, *Black Looks* 34). This already sheds light onto the construction of race as difference and the effect on how masculinities differ when talking about

the black or the white body, thereby reproducing white supremacy and white hegemonic masculinity as the ‘ultimate’ norm (Hall, “Whites of their Eyes” 97).

Especially in classical Hollywood, the film contributes to the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity by drawing the audience’s attention towards the meanings of gender that the motion pictures transport (Bennett et al. 60): the male protagonist (usually white) is positioned as the “bearer of the look” (Nixon 314) which aligns the look of the audience with that of the protagonist (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 365). In this regard, cinema structures the manner in which the spectator sees and looks at the characters within in the film that, at the same time, reflect the gender norms and ideology of Hollywood cinema (361; McCabe 14). However, not only does this mean that the images of the active man and passive woman and her objectification as the sexual object are maintained (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 369; De Lauretis, “Eccentric” 155), also issues of race and class are perpetuated: “Every narration places the spectator in a position of agency; and race, class and sexual relations influence the way in which this subjecthood is filled by the spectator” (Diawara qtd. in hooks, *Black Looks* 117). As Fanon states, white people have a “fixed concept” (35) of black people that contributes to the stereotypical casting of African-American actors as characters connected to crime or other social issues and African-American actresses as characters in social spheres (Bucciferro 172). The inclusion of these stereotypes in Hollywood films eases the association of African-Americans with “hostility, aggressiveness, and misogyny” (Dunbar 5). The Hollywood stereotypes of black people (Stadler 153) therefore emphasize ‘difference’ between white and black people. This ‘difference’ is the main way of representation – meaning that the perceived difference is open to constant change (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 709). This in turn influences racism, which “is in part sustained by the defensive institutions of the working class as much as the rampant and offensive institutions of the capitalist class” (Hall, “Teaching Race” 134). As such, race and class are intricately linked and sustain each other.

In *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*, the normative masculinity portrayed is established in the form of a “face-off masculinity” (Ibaseta 74) in which male rivalry in the rap battles and drug turf wars is used as a means of proving one’s masculinity (71). As such, the terms “aggression, competition, anxiety” (Kimmel, “Masculinity” 124) play important roles in establishing B-Rabbit’s and Marcus’ status within their communities.

This ‘face-off masculinity’ implicitly honors the American Dream where hard work and ambition are rewarded (Peberdy 49); this is especially true for *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*: Marcus earns a lot of money by selling drugs and establishes himself as a rapper by following his dream. B-Rabbit’s story is not a representation of the success of the American Dream – it is a story

about trying to fit in (Michaels 9); the film shows that trials of strength to prove oneself are part of all systems of masculinity (Conway-Long 62) – B-Rabbit is the quintessential fighter.

Every scene analyzed introduces a different form of masculinity for the character in the film. To allow for a comparison, the introduction scene of each character in question will be analyzed, followed by a selection of subsequent scenes. Especially regarding the protagonists more masculinities are present within the film, but the most important types were chosen to represent the characters as it would otherwise exceed the thesis' limit.

Because the male protagonists are at the center of the films, they will be analyzed first to then be compared to those characters posing obstacles and problems for the protagonists.

3.1. “I'm the best, don't you get it? Forget it, when I spit it, it's crazy” – introducing the protagonists

Both B-Rabbit and Marcus appear in the first scenes of the films as fighters. B-Rabbit appears as a boxer, and Marcus as a gun-slinging gangsta. They signal strength and emotional independence through their body language and the framing of the mise-en-scène. Further scenes then show them in different lights: as fathers and as lovers.

B-Rabbit takes on the role of the father figure who cares for and is worried about his sister's safety and security, with Marcus becoming a father to his son, Antwan, during the film. The analyzed scene shows Marcus as he spends time with his son. Whilst B-Rabbit is attracted to Alex and becomes closer to her, Marcus meets Charlene who will become both his girlfriend and mother to his son as well as an important support in his quest of becoming a successful rapper.

3.1.1. The fighter

The opening scene of B-Rabbit in *8 Mile* establishes him as a fighter through the deployment of his body language. The mise-en-scène, however, begins with a black screen (00:00:45) and the seemingly non-diegetic hip hop song “Shook Ones Part II” playing in the background (Speidel 100). At 00:01:00 the film transitions into the mise-en-scène which introduces B-Rabbit.

The entire scene takes place in the bathroom at The Shelter⁴ where the lighting does not change: B-Rabbit is lighted from above and to his right-hand side in a cold-blue-tinted light

⁴ The Shelter is the hip hop club in *8 Mile* in which battles and smaller concerts take place. For Detroit's rappers (and possibly other hip hoppers) the club is an important venue for establishing their credibility within the community. Future, B-Rabbit's best friend, is responsible for hosting the rap battles, and B-Rabbit takes part in them in order to gain respect and a contract at a music company. The Shelter is therefore used to make one's way in the music scene.

(Studiobinder). The light – denoted as cold and white – implies the understanding of whiteness as neutral in its hegemony (Francis 342) – white represents that which is “ordinary, neutral, even universal” (Cervulle xvi). Furthermore, whiteness is connected to self-control (Dyer, *White* 6) and the expectation of men to “mask [their] ... feelings” (hooks, *Black Looks* 87). As a result, these implicit notions are transported onto the body of B-Rabbit: the evoked mental concepts are conflated with the protagonist.

The first view offered of B-Rabbit is as a reflection in a cracked mirror – his face is visible as he jumps up and down to warm up for his fight. Here, the camera offers an over-the-shoulder shot (Studiobinder), with a close-up of his head that allows for the spectator to gain insight into his feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). The setting in a run-down bathroom with cracked tiles and mirrors evokes the ‘ghetto’ and thereby underlines the lower-class struggles (Boyd 326) that dominate in gangsta and hardcore albums, videos and films (Hess, *From Bricks* 2; Klein and Friedrich 86).



Figure 1: a first glimpse at B-Rabbit (00:01:12)

Throughout the scene the camera stays close to B-Rabbit in either a close-up or medium close-up shot (Studiobinder) in order to establish an intimate distance (Kress and van Leeuwen 125) with him, this manipulation of the framing of the character suggests identification with the protagonist with which the ideological message can be transported (Snead 23): In the case of B-Rabbit the message is that the individual who follows his desires will be strong and successful – which is the promised future of B-Rabbit at the end of the film.

However, the intimacy is lessened by the fragmenting of B-Rabbit's body; his whole body is not shown within a frame, but only body parts such as his hands, his feet, his face, or his upper body – his body parts are portrayed as more important than his complete body. Through the employment of fragmentation, the spectator is offered “items of information” (Kress and van Leeuwen 119) that can be viewed dispassionately. This leads to the spectator, on the one hand, to gain insight into B-Rabbit's feelings through the close-ups, on the other

hand, the fragmentation reduces the emotional closeness, indicating that B-Rabbit is removed from what the spectator feels. B-Rabbit is in control of himself, and of his masculinity (ibid.).



Figure 2: B-Rabbit's feet (00:01:16)

The use of the non-diegetic rap song and its lines, such as “to all the killers/ ‘cause they got no feelings” (00:01:00-00:01:01), introduces the element of hip hop music and its characteristics of “bravado and danger” (Watts, “Border Patrolling” 192). These characteristics are further applied to B-Rabbit’s framing within the scene as a fighter. From the beginning to 00:01:31 it is unclear to the viewer if he is warming up for a boxing match or for a different type of fight. B-Rabbit even stops warming up and moves his head from the left to the right like a boxer, all whilst holding eye contact with his reflection in the mirror. The inclusion of the mirror for framing B-Rabbit throughout the mise-en-scène points towards the psychoanalytic understanding of the gaze: the “pleasure gained from looking (**scopophilia**) is a male pleasure” (Nelmes 271), thereby indicating that B-Rabbit is (sexually) stimulating himself through the mirror. Looking is a **male** pleasure because it reproduces the “perspective of the assumed male heterosexual protagonist” (Glapka, “Piece of Meat” 87) which strengthens the masculinity of B-Rabbit: he occupies both the active position of the gaze, as well as the passive position of the



Figure 3: B-Rabbit gazes at himself (00:01:36)

object that is looked at (Powell 32). He is therefore confident in his masculinity to control the gaze whilst at the same time being controlled by himself through the gaze. According to Laura Mulvey, scopophilia “arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight (“Visual Pleasure” 363) – the fighter in the mirror is a source of pleasure for B-Rabbit.

After relaxing his neck muscles, the camera offers a shot from below (Studiobinder) which establishes a distance to the viewer, as they have to ‘look-up’ towards B-Rabbit – the protagonist has power over the spectator (Kress and van Leeuwen 132, 140). As a result, B-Rabbit alone is in control of the gaze as he can see what he looks at, but the spectator cannot (148; Nelmes 283) – the distance between the protagonist and the spectator is maintained.

Suddenly, at 00:01:40, the camera cuts to a medium shot (Studiobinder) from the left of B-Rabbit so that both his reflection and he himself are in the frame – with this decision the reflection (positioned left) is presented as ‘Given’ and B-Rabbit (positioned right) as ‘New’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 181). As a result, the spectator sees B-Rabbit in a new light as he is put into the position of new information, introducing and preparing the next shot that establishes the main theme: hip hop.

B-Rabbit starts to move his hands to the beat of the rap song, indicating that the film is about rapping because movement to the beat is an important part of signifying and socially performing rap music (White 104; Menrath 218). B-Rabbit continues to prepare for his rap during which the camera frames his head either in a close-up (Studiobinder), or his hand moving in a rapping motion (00:01:58) – fragmenting him again which helps create a distance between the spectator and B-Rabbit: **he** is the genius and focal point of the story, whereas the spectator in this case takes on the position of the witness. The constant change in role of the spectator helps them to “occupy different and contradictory roles” (Phillips 127) throughout the film, disrupting the formation of a “unified self-image” (ibid.).

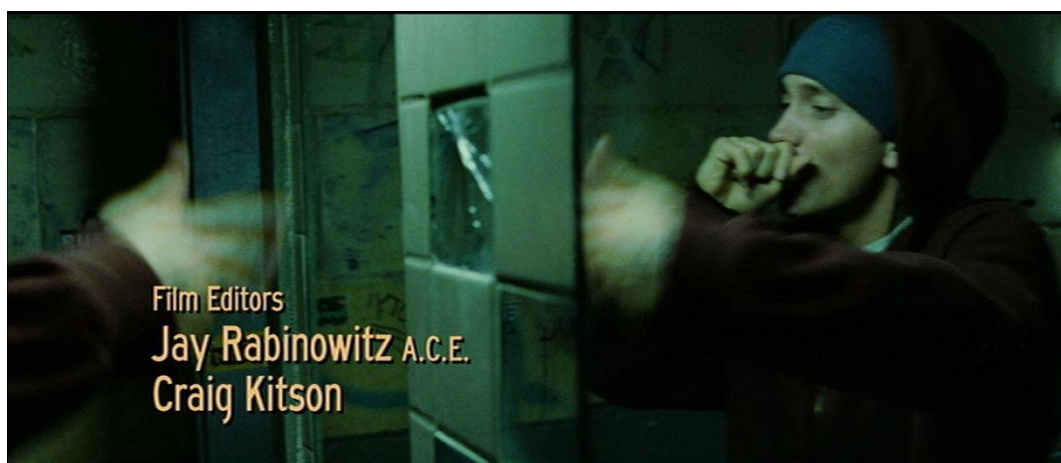


Figure 4: B-Rabbit raps (00:02:06)

So far, the mise-en-scène focused on the body movements of B-Rabbit to indicate that he is preparing for a rap battle, but at 00:02:11 a close-up (Studiobinder) of B-Rabbit's face highlights his facial expression with a slightly aggressive though stoic look, also called 'mean mugging.'⁵ The facial expression is indicative of the hypermasculine rapper (Berry 121), and by employing it within the scene, the performance of it is perpetuated as well as strengthened (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv). He embodies the fighter prepared for the fight, not hampered by emotions or insecurities – he believes himself to be the best: "I'm the best, don't you get it? Forget it, when I spit it, it's crazy" (50 Cent, "Places To Go" 00:01:08-00:01:11).



Figure 5: 'mean mugging' of B-Rabbit (00:02:11)

At 00:02:37 B-Rabbit finally stops his preparations to stare again at himself in the mirror – deriving pleasure from himself. The emphasis on the mirror indicates that B-Rabbit is the only source of pleasure for himself, he shows that narcissism is relevant for his formulation and performance of masculinity (Neale 255). It furthermore is reinforced by his posture and expression, which only he can see; he is independent from everyone and everything (Nixon 309).

Only at the end of the scene (00:02:50) the rap song is revealed to be diegetic as the song stops when B-Rabbit removes his headphones. Throughout the film, the music is motivated by the world within the film (Braidt 178). As a result, by beginning the film with a seemingly non-diegetic song and then unveiling it to be diegetic, the spectator is given to understand that the music is of utmost importance to the narrative: music adds value to the image presented (Chion 113) so that it is supported and highlighted.

The first mise-en-scène that introduces Marcus in *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* begins the same way as *8 Mile* does – with a seemingly non-diegetic song, here from 50 Cent himself: "I'll Whip Ya Head Boy." The actual mise-en-scène begins at 00:00:56 with a shot from inside a car

⁵ 'Mean mugging' is the threatening facial expression employed to prevent attacks by others in hip hop (Kubrin and Weitzer, "Violent and Misogynistic Effects" 136).

into its side mirror which vibrates with the beats of the hip hop song, making it clearer much earlier than in *8 Mile* that it is a diegetic song. As in *8 Mile*, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* incorporates the mirror as framing devices for the mise-en-scène. Contrary to B-Rabbit, Marcus does not gaze at himself, but rather at his surroundings. A possible interpretation is that Marcus regards the city as functioning as a sign for the female body (Powell 23) – the city is his object of desire that he sees as subordinate (Doane, “Woman’s Stake” 86), as a place to be dominated. The entire mise-en-scène takes place in the car, intermittently offering tracking shots (Studiobinder) of it whilst driving through the city, with the lighting changing due to them driving. However, the lighting throughout the mise-en-scène is quite weak, and due to it being used as a tool to shape the tone of a film (Speidel 93), it gives the scene from the outset a rather dark feeling which is further amplified by the time of the day that it takes place in – nighttime.

The shot from inside the car cuts to a shot out of the rear window showing yellow taxis and other cars. The yellow taxis provide the spectator with information about the city the film is set in: New York City. This is also already another difference to *8 Mile* where the first mise-en-scène keeps the spectator in the dark regarding the setting. A cut back to the side mirror (00:01:03) sees the camera slowly zooming out of the side mirror until 00:01:14 to then zoom back in. Through the cinematographic design of the framing, the viewer’s feelings towards the story are affected (Benshoff and Griffin 4), in this case the spectator is at once afforded closeness through the zooming in but also distance through the zooming out. As a result, the interaction of the viewer with the characters will probably fluctuate from intimate to impersonal distance (Kress and van Leeuwen 148).



Figure 6: the yellow taxis of New York City (00:00:55)

The first shot of a person is a close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus’ face (00:01:29), allowing intimate scrutiny of him (Speidel 93), with him looking to the left side of the screen in a pensive manner – and keeping the spectator distanced as they do not know what he is

looking at (Kress and van Leeuwen 175). Here we again have the push-and-pull effect of distance and intimacy.



Figure 7: Marcus looks pensive (00:01:29)

From this moment on, the camera cuts frequently to various passengers in the car that give information to the content of the scene and thereby perpetuates the stereotype of black people associated with the image of the criminal who deals in drugs and violence (Greer 210, 213). It draws light towards the “glorification of the perils and social ills present in the urban centers” (Tyree 131) that the lower class has and had to face. The lighting, the dark clothing and nighttime already suggest that the car’s travelers will participate in dangerous actions, and 00:01:31 shows one person putting on black leather gloves in an over-the-shoulder shot (Studiobinder). As the black body is often linked to dirt (Nama 80), black gloves here indicate both danger through the color black (Dyer, *White* 70), as well as the attempt to keep these hands clean, but dangerous activities will follow as indicative through the gloves.

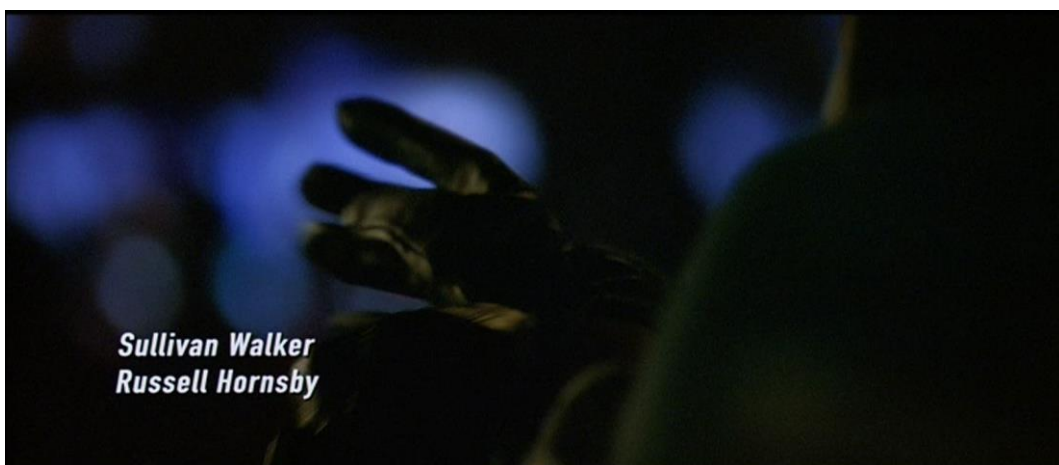


Figure 8: the black gloves (00:01:32)

At 00:01:36 the camera stays at the front of the car and presents an over-the-shoulder-shot (Studiobinder) of a young Caucasian male with a paper bag, to slowly pan to the right, showing Bama as he puts an arm around the youth’s shoulder. He leans towards him to whisper something into his ear, which presents the spectator with a sinister sight. The camera continues

to pan and shows the driver, Keryl, nodding along with the song. So far, Marcus, an unknown youth, Bama and Keryl sit in the car. At 00:01:39 the last member, Justice, is unveiled, giving a hint that both the first and the last person presented within the *mise-en-scène* will be important contributors to the development of the story. Interestingly, every person in the car is male, which supports Zinn's statement that the "workplace is an important area for the negotiation and reproduction of gender" (49), the men move the narrative along (Neroni 27) as they are the active participants (the male perspective is dominant [Ritland 1284]) who offer action and violence as images of their masculinity (Tasker 111).

From 00:01:41 to 00:01:52 the camera cuts between a tracking shot of the car driving along the street to close-ups of Keryl and Bama (Studiobinder). At 00:01:52, Marcus' eyes and nose are presented in an extreme close-up (*ibid.*), giving the spectator an insight into his feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 126) as he looks from the right to the left of the screen that is then cut to a shot of the side mirror – taking on Marcus' point of view – which shows a bridge, informing the spectator what Marcus looks at. The idea of danger is further intensified by the next shot of Justice. First, the close-up (Studiobinder) of his face gives the spectator insight into his feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 126) that are then connected to the next shot where two hands hold a gun and load it with its magazine. The inclusion of the firearm emphasizes the *mise-en-scène*'s occupation with domination and male power (Nama 77). It is not clear if Justice is the one loading the gun, or a different person, but the closeness of the two shots suggests it is Justice with the gun.



Figure 9: the gun is being loaded (00:02:11)

At 00:02:17 lighting is used to amplify the difference between white skin and black skin: The Caucasian youth's head is highlighted from the headlights with Justice's head shrouded in darkness, emphasizing the implicit understanding of black = danger and white = innocent (Fanon 113; Dyer, *White* 73).

So far, the film does not give any indication that it is concerned with hip hop, very similar to *8 Mile*. The mise-en-scène shows that the film is about danger and the four men, Marcus, Justice, Keryl and Bama, however, at 00:02:19 a close-up of Marcus' face presents further information in favor of hip hop: he raps along with the song, slightly hinting at hip hop being of importance and connected to danger as immediately after this shot the camera cuts to a close-up of a second gun being loaded – shown at 00:02:25 to be Marcus, with the Caucasian youth in the background looking on in fear. Here the idea of the masculine authority as represented by the firearm is again perpetuated (Nama 78) and contributes to the overall interpretation of the mise-en-scène as focusing on the violent hypermasculine black man (McCann 46) who is ready to fight. Furthermore, by making the decision to show two different firearms being readied they are employed as props for the “naturalized knowledge” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxii) about the gender performed, which helps to interpret it as an image of masculinity.



Figure 10: Marcus readies his gun and the young man watches him (00:02:24)

At 00:02:47 the car comes to a stop after driving through the city to their destination and cuts to a shot from the side mirror again – Marcus' viewpoint – that shakes with the beats of the song. Slowly the camera zooms in to a shop seen in the mirror, called ‘CHECKS CASHED.’ This is their target. After seventeen seconds, the car shuts off, the music and its beats stop, and the cocking of a gun can be heard very clearly. With Marcus' “Let's do this” (00:03:07), the mise-en-scène ends, which emphasizes Marcus' portrayal as a gun-slinging gangsta ready for any fight that might come his way.

Both B-Rabbit as well as Marcus are portrayed in their first scenes as fighters, even though the performance of this type of masculinity differed greatly. Whereas B-Rabbit relies on his body in perpetuating the image of the boxer, Marcus employs props that help establish the image of the gangsta fighter. However, B-Rabbit and Marcus signal aggressiveness and domination which are important for constructing masculinity (Ćuk 138; Akthar and Hynes 119),

although Marcus' masculinity contributes to the general perception of black people being hypermasculine and hyperviolent (McCann 3).

3.1.2. The father (figure)

Even though B-Rabbit is not a father, his mother's pre-occupation with her boyfriend and own life means that she is not as present in her children's lives as expected by a mother who is supposed to be "subservient to their children" (Neroni 45), which results in B-Rabbit taking on the role of the father figure for his sister.

A good example of the disparity, where B-Rabbit takes on the role of the caring father, is after their altercation with Greg. The mise-en-scène begins at 01:05:01 with a higher angle shot (Studiobinder) of Stephanie and B-Rabbit on the ground in the family's trailer, breathing heavily because of the physical and verbal fight with Greg, making the spectator more powerful and in control (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). By setting the mise-en-scène in the trailer, unconsciously the image of the lower class is evoked and helps further the understanding of B-Rabbit as the poor white male who tries to become accepted through his love of hip hop (Hess, "Hip-Hop Realness" 382).



Figure 11: B-Rabbit and Stephanie on the ground (01:05:01)

Immediately at the beginning of the scene B-Rabbit and Stephanie are not aware of anyone or anything else as they try to comprehend what just happened, but at 01:05:03 Lily whimpers, drawing attention to her presence. A cut frames Lily in an eye-level shot (Studiobinder) as she is hiding beneath the table, trying to block out everything by keeping her eyes and ears closed. This cinematographic decision lets the spectator experience the situation in the trailer as if part of it (Benshoff and Griffin 3). B-Rabbit looks to the right side of the

screen, where Lily sits, and says: “Oh my god. Lily” (01:05:05), realizing in this moment that she witnessed the altercation.



Figure 12: Lily hides (01:05:05)

From this, the camera cuts to an eye-level shot (Studiobinder) of B-Rabbit with Stephanie in the background. He is, compared to Stephanie, in the shadows, whereas she is lighted from the side, emphasizing her whiteness. Interestingly, contrary to the commonly perpetuated impression, that “whiteness is only white ... when it is explicitly set against non-white” (Dyer, *White* 13), here Stephanie’s whiteness is stressed through the lighting that idealizes her – she is “permeated by light” (122) – that draws the spectator’s attention towards her so that they can construct her character further.

B-Rabbit has already noticed Lily; Stephanie, however, continues to stare at the door, giving no indication that she is aware of Lily or even B-Rabbit. The camera continues to focus on B-Rabbit as he moves closer to Lily, indicating that he is both physically and emotionally closer to Lily than Stephanie. At 01:05:14, B-Rabbit is framed from the side in an eye-level shot (Studiobinder), he sits with his arms open and scoots closer to the table. This shot allows the spectator to see Stephanie finally noticing her youngest child, the camera controls the gaze (Nelmes 283) and thereby puts the viewer in the masculine position (Kaplan 130) with which to look at the woman. She stays silent and immobile, an indication that she is deemed as weak (hooks, *Writing Beyond Race* 34-35) and fulfills with her silence the “sexist ‘right speech of womanhood’ – the sign of woman’s submission” (hooks, *Talking Back* 6). She thereby perpetuates the socially constructed assumption of women (Butler, *Gender Trouble* x) by

performing through repetition the acts of the dependent woman (Kubrin and Weitzer, “Misogyny” 4).



Figure 13: B-Rabbit encourages Lily to come to him (01:05:14)

To allow for the spectator to see the process of Lily coming out from underneath the table, a shot-reverse-shot (Studiobinder) shows Lily coming closer, with B-Rabbit encouraging her. B-Rabbit is here in control and the one to provide for and protect his sister, performing characteristics associated with the masculine father figure (Akthar and Hynes 124). Once she is in his arms (01:05:23), he hugs her to his chest with the camera offering a close-up of them both (Studiobinder), helping the spectator identify with their closeness and emotions (Kress and van Leeuwen 126).



Figure 14: Lily and B-Rabbit hug (01:05:24)

After a moment, the camera pans to frame Stephanie in an eye-level shot (Studiobinder), she has not moved from her place on the floor, which further strengthens her portrayal as weak and submissive.



Figure 15: Stephanie sits alone (01:05:28)

The scene closes with B-Rabbit and Lily hugging, and him telling her, “[i]t’s okay” (01:05:31), framed as a close-up of his face and hand holding her close to him (Studiobinder). With this, the spectator is informed of his fulfilment of the father figure and protector, reinforcing both the physical and emotional opposition between him and Stephanie, between man and woman (Peberdy 27) as she does not fulfil her role as mother, the “natural nurturer” (van der Westhuizen 36). This concludes *8 Mile*’s scene which stands in contrast to *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* where Marcus is only shown once alone with his son, Antwan, as B-Rabbit spends more time alone with Lily, emphasizing his father instincts.

Marcus’ scene with his son in *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* is supported by the song “Window Shopper,” different to the counterpart in *8 Mile* where no music is audible. The song starts as diegetic in a previous rapping scene but continues as non-diegetic music in the subsequent scenes and offers not directly an anchor for the mise-en-scène (Bennett et al. 14), but rather serves as a reminder of Marcus’ rapping talent and his motivation to continue pursuing his dream.

At 01:36:25 Marcus and his son, Antwan, are shown alone outside in the white winter landscape as they spend time with each other. Marcus encourages his son to freely walk towards him – which makes Antwan around one year old. By ensuring that father and son are alone in the frame and spend quality time with each other, the image of the rapper as having a poor relationship with his father (Greer 215; Nixon 294) and, as a consequence, with his own children is negated. Here, the father is performed as divergent to the dominant image of fatherhood in rap (Berry 124), which also includes a different perspective on lower-class families. As hip hop emerged in the lower class, the decision to include a healthy and complete

father-son-bond also positively influences the perception of lower-class families within *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 194; Hasted 109).



Figure 16: Marcus and Antwan in the snow (01:36:26)

Towards the beginning of the *mise-en-scène*, Marcus bends down and opens his hands, shown via a high-angle long shot (Studiobinder) that helps establish power within the role of the spectator as well as an impersonal distance that keeps them removed from the family (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). A cut then frames Antwan in a full shot (Studiobinder) as he walks towards his father, who stands to the right-hand side of the camera (01:36:28), involving the spectator with this cinematographic decision (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). The camera then begins to tilt up to a low-angle cowboy shot (Studiobinder) of Marcus as he walks in a funny manner towards Antwan, picking him up. The low-angle cowboy shot helps establish Marcus as being in power, both regarding the relationship with his son and the spectator (Kress and van Leeuwen 140). During the movement of bending down and picking Antwan up, the camera tilts with Marcus. At 01:36:33 a cut shows a high-angle close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus holding his son high up, beaming with a smile and revealing his feelings both to his son and spectator (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). Throughout the *mise-en-scène* the camera is positioned as invisible, Marcus does not look directly into it at any point. This results in the gaze structuring the scene in the dominant ideology of the male being the focal point of the story (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 361; Benshoff and Griffin 251), supported by the lack of women in this *mise-en-scène*.

The background is white snow, and as such establishes good contrast between the characters and the background, Marcus' face is fully lighted. Here, whiteness is constructed as

natural – presented as snow – and serves as the binary opposite of Marcus’ black skin, further perpetuating the idea of blackness as ‘Other’ (Collins 179; Gormley 29; Kucich 65).



Figure 17: Marcus holds Antwan high up (01:36:33)

Over the hip hop song Marcus asks Antwan: “Who’s your daddy, boy?” (01:36:34); in the middle of the sentence the shot cuts to one from a high-angle to a low-angle shot of Antwan (Studiobinder), playing with power relations of looking (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). The question highlights the ‘missing father’ issue of rap and of the film (Berry 124; Hasted 109). This cuts to a high-angle close-up of Marcus (Studiobinder) as he lowers his son and looks up at the sky with a smile (01:36:40), closing the scene. By offering a high-angle shot (Studiobinder) with Marcus looking UP, the Christian model of behavior is invoked: Men are of a divided nature with an internal struggle between their mind (God, in the sky) and their body (man) (Dyer, *White* 17). As such, Marcus seems to come to an understanding that allows him to have his body and mind work together.



Figure 18: Marcus looks at the sky (01:36:40)

The portrayal of the father figure has great differences between *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*, mainly due to the incorporation of other characters. B-Rabbit performs his role as the father figure caring for his sister in contrast to his mother, Stephanie, who represents the weak and silent woman, whereas Marcus spends time alone with his son and breaks with

assumptions concerning father figures, especially concerning hip hop. He is the present and loving father, contrary to his own experiences and the experiences depicted in rap songs.

Apart from the father figure, B-Rabbit and Marcus are also representatives of the role of the lover with their objects of desire: Alex in the case of *8 Mile* and Charlene in *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*.

3.1.3. The lover

After showcasing his talents as a rapper at the lunch truck at work, B-Rabbit and Alex have sex in the factory, portraying B-Rabbit as the male lover – similar to Marcus who is depicted in the same masculinity as he and Charlene reconcile and make love.

In the factory where B-Rabbit works he and Alex walk together to a private area, with the mise-en-scène of them having sex beginning at 00:54:11 with an over-the-shoulder medium close-up of them linking their hands (Studiobinder). This is a romantic gesture, indicating that their attraction is important to their decision of having sex as well as their feelings. The camera in this shot is positioned slightly behind a metal column/ construction, similar to a hidden onlooker. As the spectator gazes through the camera, which controls the gaze, they take on the role of the voyeur (Phillips 121) adding to the shot an illicit atmosphere.

By setting this scene in the factory, the struggles of the lower class are emphasized through the disparity between the idea of sexual intercourse as romantic and it taking place in a location where people earn (little) money.



Figure 19: the camera as the hidden spectator (00:54:12)

At 00:54:13 the camera cuts to a medium close-up two shot of Alex and B-Rabbit looking at each other (Studiobinder). The light comes mainly from above, highlighting her blonde hair and invoking the image of the blonde bombshell (Benshoff and Griffin 223) as well as the adjectives 'pure' and 'innocent' (Dyer, *White* 70). Later, the light puts emphasis on her white and pale skin, further underlining her image as white and pure (ibid.). During the mise-

en-scène several shot-reverse-shots (Studiobinder) of the two characters show their facial expressions in close-ups whilst having sex, helping the spectator relate to their feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). The entire scene is supported only by diegetic sounds such as breathing, or zippers being lowered (00:54:27), providing anchorage to the focused atmosphere of the scene – Alex and B-Rabbit are wrapped up in their little bubble (Bennett et al. 14). Even though Alex and B-Rabbit have sex in this mise-en-scène, they do not get undressed completely, which highlights the illicit and spontaneous nature of the act, however, Alex' top is opened and at 00:54:26 an over-the-shoulder shot (Studiobinder) focuses on Alex' breasts that are extremely pale in their dark lace bra, evoking again the virgin-whore complex (Benshoff and Griffin 210; Braidt 44).



Figure 20: Alex' breasts in their bra (00:54:27)

The camera continues to focus on Alex and B-Rabbit, especially on their upper bodies with Alex' skin highlighted by the light as B-Rabbit stays covered. This circumstance stresses the difference between them as an uncovered body is more vulnerable than a covered one (Dyer, "White Man's Muscles" 262-263) – B-Rabbit keeps himself covered and protected, both physically and emotionally. At 00:54:34 a cut to a hip-level shot (Studiobinder) shows them lowering their trousers and panties, so that they can have penetrative sex.



Figure 21: hip-level shot (00:54:35)

From an over-the-shoulder shot of Alex' face the camera moves to a hip-level shot (ibid.) of her legs as she wraps them around B-Rabbit, that then cuts to a shoulder-level shot (ibid.) as they kiss and B-Rabbit moves his hands in a circular motion on Alex' breasts (00:54:49). These close-ups enable the spectator to imagine being part of the act (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). So far, both Alex and B-Rabbit are in relative control of the intercourse, but at 00:55:02 Alex stops their kiss to lick her hand. She moves her hand down towards his penis as she penetrates herself using his genital – she takes control (00:55:12) whilst staying under the control of the male gaze using visual language of the exposed body and close-ups (Ritland 1286), highlighting the disparity between the male gaze and the female sexual power in the act.



Figure 22: Alex takes control (00:55:03)

After this, the camera repeatedly cuts between over-the-shoulder close-ups to hip-level shots focusing on their hip movements (Studiobinder), putting emphasis on the penetrative act, which is repeated and serves as a metaphor for masculinity (Nixon 294). At 00:55:48 they move closer to each other as their movement slows down and they come, offering at 00:55:58 an over-the-shoulder close-up (Studiobinder) of them leaning against each other and offering the spectator an insight into their feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 126).



Figure 23: B-Rabbit and Alex lean on each other (00:56:00)

Suddenly Alex giggles (00:56:07), with the camera tilting towards their hips, which focuses on them putting their clothes back on from a high-angle shot (Studiobinder), giving the spectator the power (Kress and van Leeuwen 140). By staying close to B-Rabbit and Alex and by choosing to use the scene within *8 Mile* the film plays with the spectator's voyeuristic phantasy of watching and gazing (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 362), masculinizing the spectator position (Mulvey, "Afterthoughts" 12). Throughout the scene, B-Rabbit does not contribute anything else except his body to the sexual intercourse, underlining the importance of the body in the production of gender (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 86), however, also highlighting that the perception of the male body is tied up with penetrative sex, which contributes to the normative masculinity portrayed (Nixon 294; Ibaseta 69). Contrary to the rather unromantic sex scene in *8 Mile*, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* infuses feelings in its approach.

The sex scene between Marcus and Charlene is more romantically charged, especially through its use of non-diegetic music and its setting: at their home, in their bed. The scene takes place after their reconciliation and begins at 01:32:40 with an over-the-shoulder shot offering a close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus without his mouth wired shut and Charlene with her forefinger in his mouth to touch the gun fragment. By employing the close-up, the spectator is both given information as to their feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 148) and are included in the atmosphere of the *mise-en-scène* – helping the viewer to identify with the characters (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 363). They are both lighted from the sides and above in a warm light. At 01:32:41 Marcus closes his mouth around her finger and slowly pulls away, this then cuts to an over-the-shoulder shot focusing on Charlene as she begins to smile (Studiobinder). During this shot, non-diegetic romantic music begins to play, indicating what is to come and adds an emotional dimension to the *mise-en-scène* (Vernon 49). Through the lighting, music and camera shot framing, the *mise-en-scène* conveys the close and loving relationship between Charlene and Marcus (Benshoff and Griffin 4).



Figure 24: Charlene's finger in Marcus' mouth (01:32:46)

They begin to kiss each other and at 01:33:01 Charlene says to Marcus: “I wanna feel your body.” This shot slowly dissolves (Heckmann), with the next shot showing them on bed. The light here is from the window, but warm and soft, interacting with the romantic music to establish a loving and romantic atmosphere of them in bed. They are seen in a close-up (Studiobinder) with Charlene sitting on Marcus, she is higher than him and needs to bend her head to kiss him, her hands cradle his head. This position establishes her as having control in their relationship – she is undoing the passive role of women in relation to men (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 93) as she takes on an active role.



Figure 25: Charlene and Marcus kiss (01:33:10)

At 01:33:12 the camera slowly tilts down, showing her naked breasts and Marcus’ hands on her back, removing from Charlene the active role as she is ‘reduced’ to her body through the visual display as material object (Ponterotto 134) whereas Marcus is only shown from the shoulders upwards. They are both vulnerable due to their naked bodies (Dyer, *White* 146), but only Charlene’s is presented to the gaze as “surface of the image ... she is the image” (Doane, “Masquerade” 497-499). Once the camera rests on his hands, Marcus takes control and flips them around, so that he is now on top. A slow dissolve (Heckmann) shows a close-up of them kissing, with Marcus on top of her which is then dissolved to a hip shot (Studiobinder), framing Marcus as he trails his mouth down her stomach (01:33:20). All through these shots, Charlene is the image presented through the masculine ‘point of view’ (Mulvey, “Afterthoughts” 12).

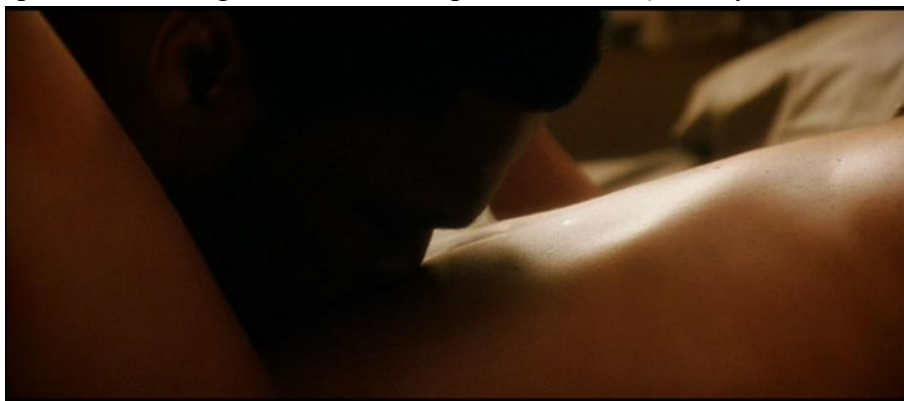


Figure 26: Marcus trails his mouth down Charlene’s body (01:33:21)

Again, and again the camera dissolves between close-ups of Charlene's face and Marcus kissing her body and moving lower (Heckmann, Studiobinder), making her hold the look to signify male desire (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 364). At 01:33:27 a high-angle shot (Studiobinder) shows them spooning, with Marcus kissing her back and penetrating her; he is the one in movement, being active and thereby fulfils the expectation of cinematic masculinity (Benshoff and Griffin 204) and establishes the "masculine/feminine, active/passive polarity" (Connell 16). Charlene's face is covered by her hair. From a lower angle, 01:33:34 frames them in a face-to-face close-up (Studiobinder) having sex which concludes at 01:33:40 when their movements slow down and she opens her eyes.



Figure 27: Marcus and Charlene (01:33:38)

Similar to 8 Mile's sex scene, no loud sounds are audible – keeping this aspect of the intercourse private. At 01:33:45 the shot dissolves (Heckmann) to a close-up (Studiobinder) of them both lying on bed, she has her face in his neck, whilst he hugs her and looks up to the ceiling. The camera slowly moves away from them whilst the diegetic song "I'll Whip Ya Head Boy" begins, indicating the conclusion of the mise-en-scène.



Figure 28: Marcus looks up to the ceiling (01:33:46)

Marcus and Charlene are depicted as the loving couple within the film, but especially in the sex scenes. Contrary to this romantic portrayal, Alex and B-Rabbit have sex in his

workplace, illicit and hidden which points to a different understanding of sex and relationships within the film *8 Mile*. B-Rabbit is almost used by Alex to satisfy her sexual urges, whereas Marcus is in control and the one penetrating Charlene.

3.2. “You can't be me, not in your wildest fantasy” – the antagonists on the way to success

The protagonists, and heroes of their life stories, Marcus and B-Rabbit, stand in the foreground, however, they need to face obstacles through which they can show their drive towards achieving their dreams (of being a respected emcee) and their freedom (Tasker 111). In the films the obstacles are linked to people, for Marcus the character of Majestic becomes his obstacle throughout the film, and for B-Rabbit Papa Doc and his crew Leadaz of Tha Free World stand in his way of achieving his goals. Interestingly, Majestic is shown to portray several masculinities – the father figure, the boss, the king, etcetera – as he is part of Marcus' life from a young age onwards, with Papa Doc only portraying in his scenes three differing masculinities: the fighter, the boss and the bully. As a result of the extensive coverage of Majestic within *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, more analysis material is available. The selected scenes do not show every masculinity portrayed by Majestic but are selected due to their importance to the overall storyline.

3.2.1. The fighter

The scene that introduces Papa Doc depicts him as a fighter. It begins at 00:05:07 with an extreme close-up in which solely his mouth and the microphone in his hand are framed (Studiobinder). Through this he reveals his feeling of wanting to ‘destroy’ his opponent (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). At first, the camera stays static and close to Papa Doc as he moves

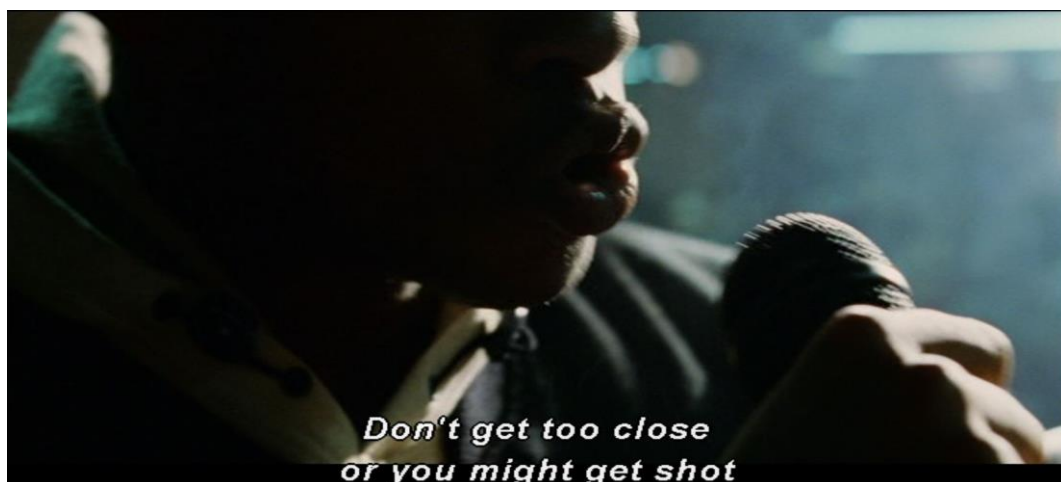


Figure 29: Papa Doc during his rap (00:05:13)

around during his rap, resulting in him moving partly out of the frame (00:05:07-00:05:09). The effect of the static camera and dynamic movement of the subject creates a disparity, underlining that the relation between the spectator and character is imaginary (ibid.) and that the gaze is controlled by the camera (Phillips 121). Throughout the mise-en-scène the lighting is extreme from the side through the spotlights directed towards the stage – making it clear that the participants of the battle are important (Dyer, *White* 86). This results in one side always appearing darker than the other, already hinting that there are always different sides to a person and their motivation and offers a differing view on emotional complexity in hip hop, where this complexity is generally ignored (hooks, *Real Cool* 140). During Papa Doc's rap, from 00:05:13 to 00:05:16, the camera moves away from Papa Doc to show the location of the battle, namely The Shelter. By setting the scene at The Shelter, the introduction of the lower class, which began in B-Rabbit's first mise-en-scène, is continued.

As he hurls insults at his opponent from the first moment on, it is clear that this is a verbal battle. The opponent is finally shown at 00:05:16 as the camera cuts to the other rapper who is lighted strongly from the side. The opponent looks down as Papa Doc raps and is only framed in close-ups (Studiobinder) where the focus lies on his face (00:05:17) thereby allowing an intimate distance between the spectator and opponent (Kress and van Leeuwen 148).



Figure 30: Papa Doc's opponent at The Shelter (00:05:16)

At 00:05:19 the camera cuts to a close-up of Papa Doc (Studiobinder), offering the spectator a first ‘complete’ look at him where they receive further emotional information through the intimate distance of the camera (Kress and van Leeuwen 125) which transports aggression and hypermasculinity (Dunbar 3). The camera then moves down to frame him in a low-angle shot (Studiobinder), emphasizing here that the power lies with Papa Doc and priming the spectator in the position of the audience, “[t]hey are made to ‘look up’ to them” (Kress and van Leeuwen 132), before cutting to the audience (00:05:22) in a medium close-up (Studiobinder) where the lighting is weak and green-ish. The audience collectively gasp at a vicious line from Papa Doc: “And if she [your mother] knew him, she could bring your midget pops with her” (00:05:20-00:05:22). This is a first indication that the audience has a right to a say in the matter of the winner of the battle (Braidt 179).

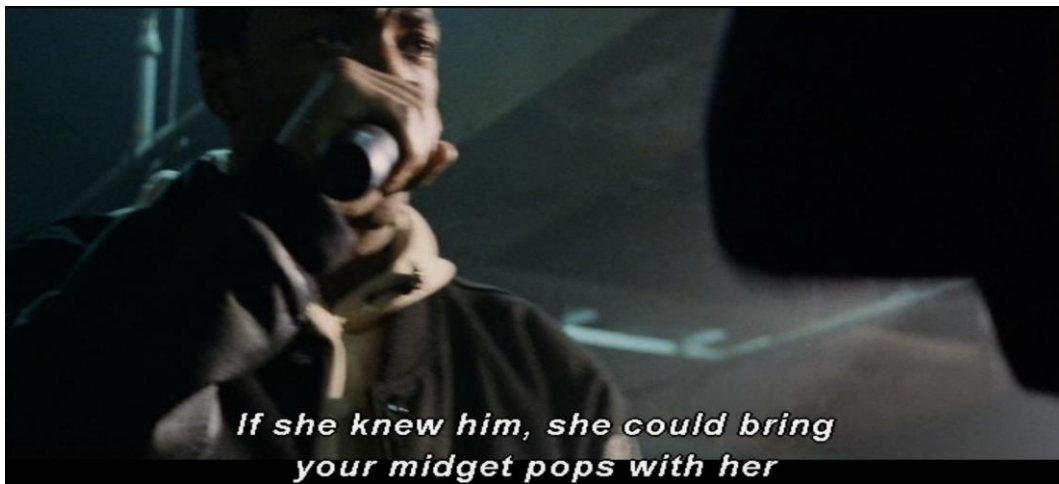


Figure 31: Papa Doc in the low-angle shot (00:05:21)

At 00:05:24 B-Rabbit is framed in a medium shot (Studiobinder) with Future’s hand and watch in the foreground, indicating that this battle is coming to an end through the employment of the image representing time (Hall, “Introduction” xxv). This cuts to an over-the-shoulder medium shot (Studiobinder) of Papa Doc, with the camera moving closer to him until it cuts to an extreme close-up of the turntable and LP playing during the battle (00:05:26; Studiobinder). By having the camera focus on Papa Doc and moving closer to him, he becomes the object of the spectator’s gaze (Kress and van Leeuwen 119).

The camera offers a close-up of Papa Doc as he moves closer and closer to his opponent that then cuts to an extreme close-up (00:05:30) which imitates the first shot of the *mise-en-scène*, closing the circle of the scene (Studiobinder). This extreme close-up allows for spittle to be seen, further underlining the force with which Papa Doc raps, thereby also helping to reinforce racial stereotypes of (black) hardcore rappers (Kubrin and Weitzer, “Misogyny” 8) as “virile, hypermasculine figure[s]” (Neal, “No Time” 59) who are often portrayed as criminal and reckless, and conflates these issues with race (Hall, “Spectacle of ‘Other’” 237). Both these characteristics are further developed in subsequent scenes.



Figure 32: the hypermasculine and aggressive rapper (00:05:30)

At 00:05:33, with the rap at an end, the camera pans up to the eyes of Papa Doc as he stares down his opponent – employing ‘mean mugging’ to telegraph “hypermasculinity and potential aggression” (White 44), and the camera moves away and more to the center of his face to almost offer a point-of-view shot (Studiobinder).

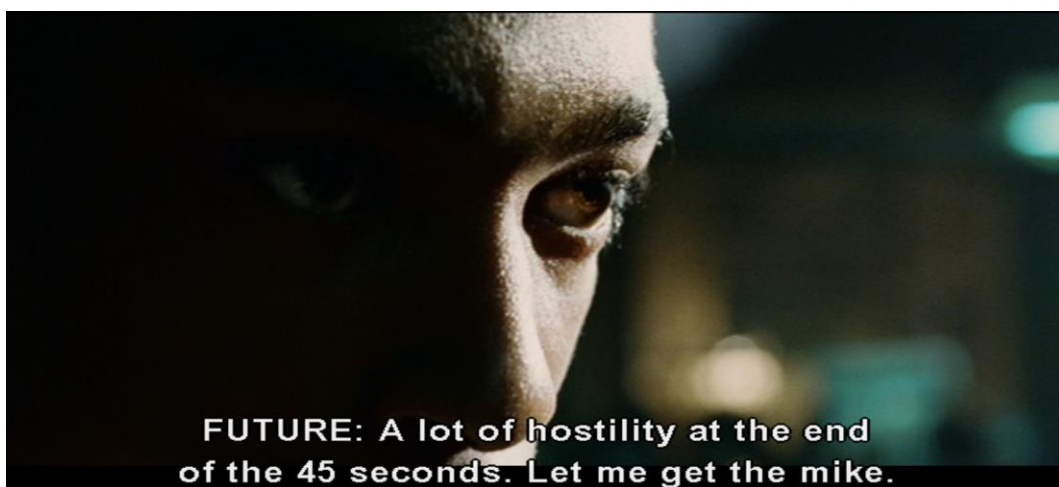


Figure 33: Papa Doc stares down his opponent (00:05:33)

The framing of Papa Doc concludes his portrayal as a fighter which offers a different introduction to Majestic who is depicted as the protector.

3.2.2. The protector

The first scene of *Majestic* begins at 00:12:51 as he comes out of a barber shop in an eye-level shot (Studiobinder) whilst wiping his face with a cloth. This shot emphasizes that no power difference between the spectator and Majestic himself is involved (Kress and van Leeuwen 140) and allows for a neutral gaze of the spectator. Majestic wears a black leather jacket with a black fishnet top underneath, a color scheme which he stays true to throughout the film. This decision already hints at Majestic's role as the main antagonist as **black** people are continued to be perceived as "full of rage" (hooks, *Writing Beyond Race* 14) and therefore reinforces the "ideological construction of black people as a 'problem population'" (Hall, "Whites of their Eyes" 102).



Figure 34: Entrance of Majestic (00:12:51)

Next to the entrance through which he enters the frame two men stand and watch the altercation taking place between Slim and Katrina over their selling spot, which includes the issue of class through mentioning drugs as they were seen in impoverished areas as means of escaping poverty (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 46). Initially, Majestic does not realize that Katrina is involved, but as soon as he hears Katrina's voice he decides to interfere – to protect her (Akthar and Hynes 124). Thus, his introduction as the protector commences. At 00:12:54 the camera cuts to Majestic's side profile in a well-lit full shot (Studiobinder) which gives us a close social distance, relating the spectator only slightly to Majestic (Kress and van Leeuwen 125). He points a finger to Marcus and tells him to stay in the car, thereby also protecting Marcus, and he becomes an active male figure as he contributes to the overall story by keeping the protagonist safe (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 365). As he takes on the characteristics of an active

male figure in the film, Majestic will continue to be depicted in different types of masculinities to fulfill the demand of three-dimensionality for such roles (ibid.).



Figure 35: Majestic the protector of Marcus (and Katrina) (00:12:54)

Around him spectators watch the unfolding fight, but do not try to interfere, giving Majestic complete power over the combatants. As he walks towards Slim and Katrina, Majestic is framed in a full, frontal shot (Studiobinder) as he is lighted only from one side to present him in his active participation to the resolution of the altercation which underlines his masculinity (Powell 32). He comes closer and the camera cuts to an eye-level cowboy shot (Studiobinder) as he is lit from the front to allow for a thorough reading of his expression of toughness (Powell 32). The focus lies on Majestic in this frame, even though Slim and Katrina are in it as well, however, unfocused, and thereby reduced to the background. As soon as Majestic reaches the dealers, he acts and puts his body between the fighters to break up the fight (00:13:03).



Figure 36: Majestic as he uses his body to break up the fight (00:13:04)

He uses his body in this instance and transports associations with largeness – he takes space – and strong leadership abilities as he is secure in his assumption that he can control both Slim and Katrina (Benshoff and Griffin 205). His body is employed further as he grabs Katrina

around her upper body and walks her away from Slim, he takes control of the situation and thereby defines her difference as woman (as an object) to men (De Lauretis, “Eccentric” 155).

As Slim does not understand through Majestic’s interference that the altercation is over and comes closer again, Majestic pushes him away – all three are framed in a shoulder-level medium shot (Studiobinder) with the lighting very strong from all angles, allowing for detailed scrutiny of their gestures and facial expressions as Majestic tells Slim to “get the fuck outta here” (00:13:08). Here, the camera frames him frontally, involving the spectator within the scene (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). At 00:13:13 the camera frames Majestic and Katrina as he continues to hold her, to keep her from running after Slim. He maintains control over her (Gledhill and Ball 371). The camera stays on the two but pans to the left as they move because Katrina wants to be let go by Majestic: “Get the fuck off of me!” (00:13:17-00:13:18). She is not grateful for Majestic’s help and signals a certain mistrust of him which is further amplified by her saying to him: “Go back to prison” (00:13:20).



Figure 37: Majestic controls Katrina as he has a hold of her (00:13:14)

Katrina walks towards Marcus, who stands in the road with tongs, and asks him angrily why he got of the car. She is framed in a shoulder-level medium shot (Studiobinder) and bends down towards Marcus, with the camera moving with her. The spectator takes on a social distance to the mother-son pair which helps relate to them both (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). In the background Majestic stands and watches their interaction, he is only a dark figure where the spectator sees solely his outline, introducing a foreboding element which is amplified by the commencing, disquieting non-diegetic instrumentals (Vernon 49) when the camera cuts at 00:13:55 to a shoulder-level cowboy shot of Majestic (Studiobinder) that shows him standing where Katrina left him, he is lit from all sides, emphasizing his dark clothing and concluding his introduction.

With this mise-en-scène Dangerous is introduced and shown to be the protector but also at the same time a figure of danger which is alluded to through the framing and clothing.



Figure 38: The dark and dangerous image of Majestic (00:13:56)

However, Majestic plays a further important role in the drug business as the boss, similar to Papa Doc who heads the crew Leadaz of Tha Free World.

3.2.3. The boss

The second mise-en-scène containing Papa Doc shows him as the boss of his crew, as well as someone who feels empowered with a gun – which can be seen as “an exclusive extension of masculine authority” (Nama 80). The scene starts at 00:29:15 with the crew Leadaz of Tha Free World standing in front of their big, black SUV; a material symbol of the white capitalist ‘American Dream’ that most youth want to gain to demonstrate their worth (Gormley 106; Rabaka 183; Watts, “Exploration” 596). The entire crew are ‘mean mugging’ the rest of the people in the parking lot, further emphasizing their authority through the gaze (White 61). Apart from that, the setting in the parking lot highlights class and its “culture and values” that represent gangsta rap (Quinn 3). The members of Leadaz of Tha Free World are framed in a medium shot (Studiobinder) that helps establish the social relation between the characters involved in the scene (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). Papa Doc smokes, another member drinks from a bottle and the rest stand there, signaling authority through their posture (White 61).



Figure 39: Papa Doc and his crew (00:29:15)

At 00:29:16 the member Lickety Splytt jumps onto a car and announces to everyone that he and Papa Doc will battle anybody present in the parking lot. The camera offers a low angle medium shot (Studiobinder) of Lickety Splytt, giving him power over the spectator and the viewers at the parking lot (Kress and van Leeuwen 148) with bright lighting emphasizing and highlighting his face and clothing as he garners their attention. The camera then moves to an establishing shot (Studiobinder) from behind Lickety Splytt, showing the other rappers present. These are the people over which Leadaz of Tha Free World ‘rule,’ which thereby distinguishes between superior (Leadaz of Tha Free World) and inferior (the rest of the people present) (hooks, *Talking Back* 19). Papa Doc is lighted well from all sides in the medium eye-level shot (Studiobinder) at 00:29:24 as he ‘mean mugs’ everyone else, but he stays silent and lets Lickety Splytt do the talking. However, Papa Doc interferes during the insult of Lickety Splytt against the Three One Third crew by saying to Future: “What are you going to do, faggot?” (00:29:51). By using this derogative insult, he equates Future with ‘femininity’ and thereby also with weakness and subordination (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 237) and perpetuates the commonly held belief of hip hop being full of stereotypes and offensive language (Dyson, “Foreword” xiii) as it often has been blamed for the “transmission and reproduction of sexism and misogyny” (Neal, “I’ll Be Nina Simone” 247).

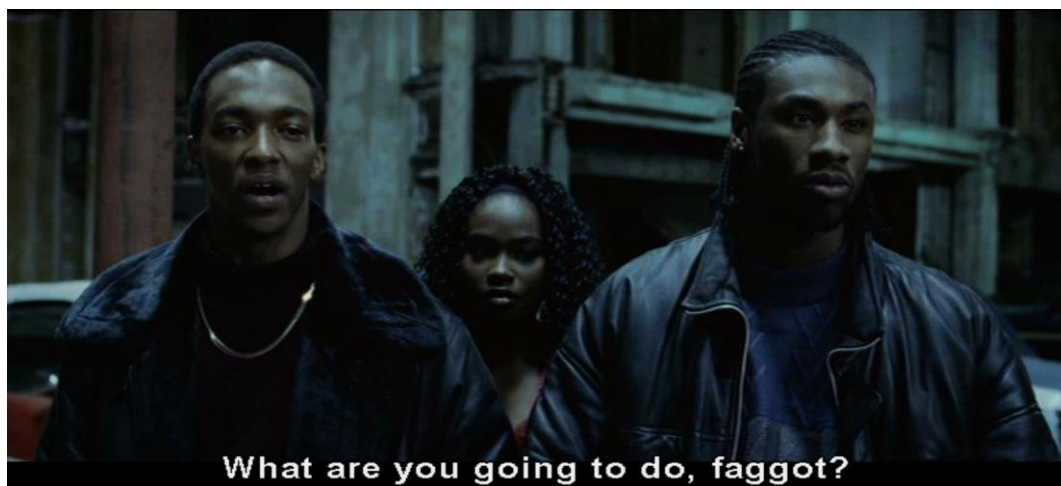


Figure 40: Papa Doc insults Future with a derogative question (00:29:51)

The following shots depict Future and Papa Doc trading insults, with 00:29:55 framing Papa Doc in a medium eye-level shot (Studiobinder) as he lifts his hand with the cigarette to continue smoking – he is coolness incarnate as nothing can get to him (Francis 333). Lickety Splytt escalates the situation by teasing B-Rabbit about his last performance at The Shelter, where he ‘choked,’ and tells him to “take that white ass rap back across 8 Mile” (00:29:59-00:30:02), making whiteness and its perceived ‘Otherness’ within hip hop visible (Frankenberg 1; Hess, “Hip-Hop Realness” 375). B-Rabbit pulls his legs out from him and a scuffle between everyone ensues. At 00:30:12 a medium eye-level shot (Studiobinder) shows Papa Doc pulling a gun out of his jacket: “The firearm in American cinema has long been symbolically synonymous with the threat of male sexual power and domination” (Nama 77). He first looks at it in an unsure manner, with the smoke from his cigarette wafting around him, but then he looks up and points it into the throng of people, depicting domination (ibid.).



Figure 41: Papa Doc and the gun (00:30:12)

A cut frames the gun and his hand in an extreme close-up (Studiobinder; 00:30:14) with his finger is positioned on the trigger, putting the gun into the spotlight and emphasizing its power (Kress and van Leeuwen 176), that is then interrupted by a cut to the fight and people seeing the gun. At 00:30:17 people get to Papa Doc and diffuse the situation – Papa Doc and Wink are framed in a close-up (Studiobinder) with Papa Doc’s face very difficult to decipher as the light from above puts his face into the shadows, equating darkness with danger (Hall, “Work of Representation” 17). At 00:30:21 Papa Doc puts his gun away. Wink calms everyone down and the crews separate, with Leadaz of Tha Free World standing together, which gives further information on their social standing: them versus the rest (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). Papa Doc’s girlfriend holds his jacket lapels in both her hands (00:30:34) as if she wants to hide the firearm from everyone and the crew stare at Three One Third as they leave the parking lot. With this, the mise-en-scène ends.



Figure 42: Papa Doc and his crew watch the others leave (00:30:34)

So far in *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, Majestic has not been seen directly involved in the drug trade, but at 00:27:11 he is depicted in showing his dealers how to produce crack, fulfilling the general premise of black films that depict characters “in the ‘hood or on crack” (Erigha 115). He is the boss teaching his subjects what they need to do. Throughout the scene the lighting comes from above with the focus on Majestic (Dyer, *White* 85) – those further along the table are more in the dark, both in the frame as well as in the knowledge of crack production. The camera begins by framing Majestic in a medium shot (Studiobinder) from the side but moves around the table to frame him more from the front (until 00:27:22) which ensures the involvement of the spectators as they take on the position of the other dealers to be instructed (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). Majestic is dressed in dark green clothing and stands nonchalantly by the table with one leg high up on a stool as he begins the process of making crack. Crack was the most important drug in the business during the mid-1980s as it was “a cheap, smokable form” of cocaine (Nielson and Dennis 40) and therefore it is also the perfect example for the paradox of consumerism: the desire to consume even though one suffers from extreme poverty (Neal, “Postindustrial” 368).



Figure 43: Majestic, the boss (00:27:18)

At 00:27:27 the camera cuts to a cowboy shot of one of the dealers present, with a close-up of Majestic's hand holding the glass carafe with the mixture of the drug and a fluid, probably water, in the foreground (Studiobinder). As such, the visual structuring of the frame points to the importance of both the drug and the black dealers who depend upon each other (Kress and van Leeuwen 47), it perpetuates the ideological message of race – “blacks are the source of the problem [namely the drug addiction]” (Hall, “Whites of their Eyes” 104, 106). However, at the same time the focus on drugs hides the issue of class as poverty helps perpetuate drug addiction (Michaels 17; hooks, *Black Looks* 33; Dyer, *White* 19; Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 46).



Figure 44: the drug dealers watch the glass carafe (00:27:27)

The focus of the camera moves back to Majestic at 00:27:31 as he says to the glass carafe and the drug within: “Dance for daddy. That’s right, baby” (00:27:30-00:28:31), thereby highlighting the conflation of drugs and derogatory understandings of women (Swedenburg 587). Majestic is the center of attention of everyone present in the room, he is the ultimate sharer of knowledge. Once the drug crystallizes, a close-up (Studiobinder) frames Majestic’s hand as he lifts the crystal out of the container (00:27:58).



Figure 45: Majestic with the crystal (00:28:08)

This offers the image of the crystal as an object of importance to the spectator (also within the film) (Kress and van Leeuwen 119), which is further underlined by Majestic holding the crystal high into the air (00:28:08); the crystal thereby symbolizes by its elevated position that it is and should be regarded as the ultimate grail: “See this shit? This is gonna take us out of the ghetto” (00:28:10-00:28:12), controlling the spectator through the employment of the “objectifying gaze [which] infuses American culture” (White 24). Here the lower-class struggles within the black neighborhood are further highlighted and the understanding of drug dealing as a way of escaping poverty perpetuated (Neal, “Postindustrialism” 369).

Even though Papa Doc and Majestic are the bosses of their respective area – the rap crew and the drug business, – their depictions are quite different. Papa Doc is one member of his crew and leads it but is always surrounded and supported by the others whereas Majestic stands alone at the top and does not depend upon anyone. At the same time, Majestic is, so far, calm and collected, an interesting contrast to Papa Doc who is volatile and unrestrained, especially when it comes to violence. This violent image is further developed in his third scene.

3.2.4. The bully

The entire scene depicts the beating up of B-Rabbit by the hands of the Leadaz of Tha Free World crew at the trailer park where B-Rabbit lives with his mother and sister – making class appear as a structuring element within the *mise-en-scène*, and helps to associate hip hop with the ghetto (White 39). However, towards the end, Papa Doc and B-Rabbit are the only ones involved, portraying Papa Doc as the bully who is ready to kill B-Rabbit to be rid of him. He perceives B-Rabbit as a threat to his dominance, but still believes that he is the best: “You can't be me, not in your wildest fantasy” (NAS, “U Wanna Be Me” 00:01:09-00:01:12).

At 01:15:26 B-Rabbit lies on the ground with no other sound audible except the click of a gun being loaded, establishing an ominous atmosphere. The gun and the two hands holding it are shown in a high-angle shot (Studiobinder) – here the power lies with the spectator as they look onto the object (Kress and van Leeuwen 119); as soon as the click sounds, the camera tilts up to a medium shot of Papa Doc (Studiobinder). He has the gun in his hands and is dressed in dark clothes, with his face also in the dark due to the weak lighting: he is the dangerous, dark man, “the word BLACK [is associated] with everything that is dark, evil, forbidding, devilish, dangerous and sinful” (Hall, “Work of Representation” 17).

At 01:15:28 the camera cuts to an over-the-shoulder shot (Studiobinder) of Papa Doc bending down towards B-Rabbit, Papa Doc's face is lighted from the side, with the gun in the frame as he points it at B-Rabbit. The effect of the firearm in the focus of the shot is to highlight the danger that B-Rabbit faces in this moment and heightens the tension of the *mise-en-scène* and affects the spectator's feelings (Benshoff and Griffin 4).



Figure 46: *The black, dangerous man - Papa Doc (01:15:30)*

The camera moves down into a low-angle close-up (Studiobinder) of B-Rabbit's face and the gun held to it, by employing this camera angle Papa Doc's power over B-Rabbit is stressed (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). In this shot the lighting emphasizes B-Rabbit's whiteness against the dark clothing and black gun, drawing the spectator's attention towards it: Whiteness "can only be recognized when placed in comparison to something (or someone) that is considered not *white*" (Benshoff and Griffin 55). The camera zooms in to B-Rabbit's face as Papa Doc talks and helps the viewer to better understand and relate to his fear (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). At 01:15:37 the camera cuts to a low angle over-the-shoulder medium close-up (Studiobinder) of Papa Doc as he stares at B-Rabbit and comes close to pulling the trigger, but from the background, where the rest of the crew stand, Wink runs to B-Rabbit and Papa Doc and tells him not to do it. Even though Wink was a participant in the beating up of B-Rabbit, he still protects him and is therefore shown in an ambivalent light – in this situation the statement "blacks are rarely coded as pure negativity" (Snead 94) is fulfilled.

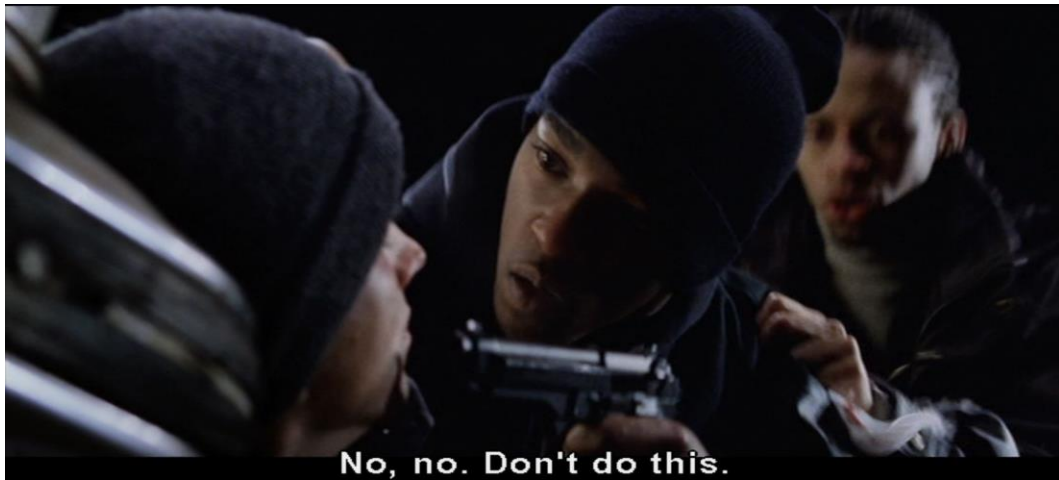


Figure 47: Wink tells Papa Doc to not shoot B-Rabbit (01:15:37)

From Wink's interference, the camera cuts to a close-up of B-Rabbit (01:15:40) scared and hurt, helping the spectator understand his fear better (Kress and van Leeuwen 126), and a low angle medium close-up of Papa Doc (Studiobinder) shows that the danger is not yet over as Papa Doc continues to be in a position of power (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). The camera then tilts up to follow Papa Doc as he gets up and walks away backwards (01:15:44). The crew get into the car and as B-Rabbit continues to lie on the ground the car drives away, framed in a ground-level shot (01:16:11) which gives the spectator an idea as to how B-Rabbit views the exit of Leadaz of Tha Free World (Studiobinder).



Figure 48: B-Rabbit on the ground as the car drives away (01:16:11)

This mise-en-scène further underlines the depiction of Papa Doc as a violent and volatile man dependent upon his firearm to support his authority and danger. Majestic is not shown in such a light, however, does take steps in order to finally become the king of the neighborhood.

3.2.5. The king

Once Majestic's plan to overthrow Levar is successful, the camera frames him in a short mise-en-scène to depict his interpretation of the role of the king of the drug business. At

01:04:04 a close-up shot (Studiobinder) shows a cane with a golden handle that resembles a pouncing wildcat being unpacked by Majestic himself. Through this close-up Majestic reveals his feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 126): he is the golden wildcat; he is ruthless and rich. The background reinforces his image of the exclusive and powerful man as it shows his living quarters decked out in gold and black and marks a contrast to the impoverished inner city depicted in the film (Vito 17). The camera moves away from the close-up to a medium close-up (Studiobinder) of Majestic as he smiles whilst he unpacks the cane. He is dressed in a black suit and wears a golden chain on which a huge plate with the cursive letter M hangs, thereby continuing the gold and black theme of his surroundings. The golden elements show the perception of money as a means to invest in “material icons” (Neal, “Postindustrialism” 369) by the members of the drug dealing community within the film and stresses the importance of these products to the lower class in showing their worth (Watts, “Exploration” 596).



Figure 49: *Majestic, the king* (01:04:05)

At 01:04:10 a non-diegetic rap song begins to play, which underlines the overarching theme of the mise-en-scène: “They call me K.I.N.G.” The scene ends with a cowboy shot (Studiobinder), putting further distance between Majestic and the spectator (Kress and van Leeuwen 176) as he moves into a darker direction – he walks out of the flat and closes the door behind him (01:04:14), a metaphor for shutting the door on his past and walking into his future.

Even though this mise-en-scène puts an emotional distance between the spectator and the role of Majestic, he is still viewed with the initial information from the beginning of the film where he portrayed a positive character for Marcus and supported him in his own way, like a father.

3.2.6. The caring father figure

After his mother died, Marcus became a drug dealer so that he could buy himself the newest sneakers. Majestic takes him under his wing as a substitute father figure, which is shown

in the following mise-en-scène. Throughout it only diegetic sounds from the surrounding area are audible.

The scene begins at 00:20:21 when a shoulder-level close-up (Studiobinder) shows Majestic holding Marcus' lapels and asking him: "What the fuck are you doing out here?" The close-up emphasizes the emotions felt by both – anger and annoyance/ fear (Kress and van Leeuwen 126) – and helps the spectator relate to them. It is nighttime and dark underneath the bridge, so the lighting comes mainly from the side to light their profiles which supports the implicit understanding of prohibited dealings taking place (Hall, "Work of Representation" 17). The camera continues to focus on the two but moves to a lower angle shot that frames Majestic's face and hat in a close-up (Studiobinder), with Majestic in a position of power (Kress and van Leeuwen 132).



Figure 50: Majestic as he looks at Marcus (00:20:22)

Instead of leaving Marcus alone, Majestic asks him questions regarding his motivations for being out on the streets during the night. Both wear black leather jackets, which perpetuates the forbidden element of drug dealing (00:20:24). When no satisfactory answers are forthcoming, a cut to a wide shot (Studiobinder) frames Majestic and Marcus as the former tells him to get into the car. Here the spectator is solely an invisible onlooker who is not involved in the activity presented on the screen (Kress and van Leeuwen 119). The lighting changes and now seems to come from a car's spotlights parked behind Majestic's car – it emphasizes Marcus' white sneakers in the dark scene and introduces the element of innocence regarding Marcus (Dyer, *White* 73).

From the streets the camera cuts to a different setting: a diner (00:20:33). The diner is very bright, with the lighting cold but very strong from above and the side through the windows. This has the effect that it seems impossible to keep secrets, everything is out in the open. This new scene begins with a shoulder-level shot of Marcus, Majestic and a friend of Majestic's (Studiobinder). The first sentence is spoken by Majestic: "You know what you are, kid? You're

an entrepreneur” (00:20:34-00:20:38), which sheds a light on the topic of the conversation: becoming and being a drug dealer.



Figure 51: Marcus, Majestic and the friend at the diner (00:20:33)

Interestingly, the association of black youth and drugs shaped the understanding of the general public regarding the crises during the 1970s and 1980s (Watkins 563) and links this negative connotation to the positive one in the film which understands drug dealing as a means of earning money (McCann 92). From this moment onwards the camera offers shot-reverse-shots of over-the-shoulder medium close-ups (Studiobinder) of Majestic and Marcus, and the friend sitting behind the youngster. Both Majestic and Marcus are well lit which means that their facial expressions are clearly visible and they are highlighted as the important elements in the frame (Dyer, *White* 85). At 00:20:45 Majestic moves forward on the table and gives Marcus a talk on the dangers of working on other people’s territories: “But you can’t just go walking up on other niggas’ territories like that” (00:20:46-00:20:49), trying to impart an important message, as a father would teach his son.



Figure 52: Majestic, the father, looking out for his son (00:20:46)

From that point onward, Majestic tests where Marcus stands in regards to drug dealing whilst making sure to get him to understand the dangers of the profession, but Marcus tells him in no uncertain terms that he is doing this because of the money – at this stage his focus lies on earning enough for sneakers (00:21:20-00:21:22). The film therefore perpetuates the dominant perception that the drug business is only there for earning people sufficient money so that they can buy what they want, without any regard for the effects drug dealing has on society as a whole (hooks, *Real Cool* 18).

Majestic smiles at Marcus following his answers, he shows him that he approves of his actions, and then asks, “[y]ou need anything else?” (00:21:37-00:21:38), to which Marcus replies: “A gun” (00:21:40). Marcus already shows that he understands the firearm as a symbol of power and domination (Nama 77). Majestic begins to laugh after a short moment and looks at his friend as if to say that this boy is going to go far in the business – he is the image of the proud father. The mise-en-scène ends with Majestic asking what he needs a gun for and Marcus stating that he doesn’t know (00:21:54) – yet. This also concludes the depiction of Majestic as the caring father figure who protects Marcus in his own way, namely by teaching him important lessons for the drug dealing business.

These analyses show that the masculinities portrayed in the biopics contribute to the stereotypical understanding of black men as dangerous and criminal, however, at the same time *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* shows that Majestic is not completely ‘bad.’

4. [Verse 2] “The women in my life bring confusion and shit:” patriarchal portrayals of black and white lower-class women

The focus of the two biopics in question lies, beyond any doubt, on their male protagonists and male antagonists: B-Rabbit and Papa Doc, Marcus and Majestic. However, despite the emphasis on the male and the masculinities, the women in the films fulfil several important roles to transport certain ideological meanings; they are the mothers and the lovers to the central characters. Before discussing the selected scenes and their importance and implications for and within the films, an overview and explanation of the term ‘femininities’ as well as what women in film stand for is necessary to allow for a thorough understanding of the subsequent sections.

Femininities are, like masculinities, in the plural as both terms depend on the social structural conditions (Coltrane 45) of the corresponding culture that they are repeatedly performed in. Through these repeated performances the normative phenomenon of ‘gender’ is produced (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xiv), it is constructed (Glapka and Braid vii). The repetition refers to the “reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 178) with the **set of meanings** containing the concrete activities that structure the perceptions and attitudes of the normative assumptions regarding gender (Ponterotto 144; Coltrane 54). As such, the body is at the center of these repeated practices (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 52).

When talking about gender, race and class are not to be forgotten as they too are important factors in constructing gender and its norms (Hole et al. 1). This is especially true for the emergence of stereotypes, “a projection onto the Other that makes them [women and minorities] less threatening” (hooks, “Representing Whiteness” 171), where particularly black women are stereotyped as “more sexually active and loose than other groups of women” (hooks, *Black Looks* x), and white women as in need of protection and control (Watts 191). Regarding class, the stereotype of the ‘welfare queen’ paints women who ‘choose’ not to work but (have to) rely on the monetary support of the country in a negative light (Hester-Williams par. 9). At the same time, however, class takes on a minor role in how people are perceived as they are rather viewed through the lens of race (Michaels 3; hooks, *Feminist Theory* xiii; Hall and hooks 29), making the following quote by Ice-T fitting as he succinctly puts it in the following way and underlines the conflation of class and race: “You live there ‘cause you’re broke, not because you’re black” (hooks, “Ice Opinion” par. 2). In this quote it becomes clear that stereotypes

relying on race obscure the issues that class presents and thereby help perpetuate inaccurate depictions. Stereotypes, however, do not solely depend on race, they also simply focus on the gender binaries of female and male.

In Hollywood films, women mainly represent the passive **object** of desire for the male gaze, they are there to satisfy the active and erotic look of the gaze (Snead 21; Creed 487) and are an excellent example for discussing Judith Butler's performativity, which is dependent upon bodies' activities and acts (*Undoing Gender* 198) because in films the "representations of identities are located at the site of the body" (Bernardi 9). In Hollywood film, the narrative is constructed by and alongside of the unconscious ideology of patriarchy which employs a phallogentric language through the characters themselves as well as through the cinematographic design by focusing on the active male character and keeping the female character under his 'control' (Kaplan 120; Doane, "Woman's Stake" 88). As discussed in the chapters above, men in classical Hollywood narratives are privileged in the active roles, whereas women mainly represent the love interest waiting for the man to rescue or save them (Benshoff and Griffin 203), furthering the largely unconscious assumption that the **male** is the norm (De Lauretis, "Woman's Cinema" 29). The woman is thereby positioned as subordinate compared to the man (Gledhill and Ball 367) and her image functions as a sign that represents the sexualized meaning it carries for men (Powell 23; Smelik 491; Cowie 50). Here, the body comes into play: Society's conventions regarding gender control the image and the gaze (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 360) and codes them as sexuality incarnate – the aspect of sexuality is woven into the fabric of women's lives (De Lauretis, "Eccentric" 155) and results in dominant constructions of sexuality that depend upon the body (Rose, "Big Butt" 294). For these dominant constructions a 'universal' body is produced and reproduced through the male gaze (Glapka, "Piece of Meat" 88). This 'universal' body then forms both the practice of gender and its perpetuation as well as its structure of the body (Wedgwood 334). In film, the female body is made apparent as the "foci of pleasure precisely because [it] correspond[s] to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 90). Within the films, the performed gestures, activities and fulfilled expectations create the illusion of the normative, heterosexual construct of gender (173) that is framed within the narratives' social processes and cultural norms as the univocal model (*Undoing Gender* 20). Thus, the "politics of domination" (hooks, *Black Looks* 5) – the patriarchal system – influence the manner of production and construction of films and their narratives: women play roles with little agency which transport their heightened sexuality as well as vulnerability (Bucciferro 176).

In rap, male rappers reinforce the power relation of the female subordination through the language used in their raps and music videos (Lusane 361), because of the prevalent “hip-hop machismo” (Swedenburg 587). In these lyrics derogatory references to women, and other marginalized groups, are common and include remarks such as “bitches, hoers (whores) and skeezers (gold-diggers)” (ibid.). As such, the rappers reinforce the “objectification, exploitation, or victimization of women” (Kubrin and Weitzer, “Misogyny” 10) with which negative stereotypical images of women are perpetuated (18): “The women in my life bring confusion and shit” (50 Cent, “Hustler’s Ambition” 00:00:33-00:00:35). Unfortunately, this results in the listeners’ – and viewers’ – (unconscious) understanding that abusing women is nothing bad (hooks, “Black Thang” 124). Furthermore, in *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* for example, myths about black women, especially Katrina, Marcus’ mother, abound: “myths about teenage pregnancy and single motherhood, ... myths about black women’s incompetence as mothers” (Gaunt 257) as their sons, or daughters, enter the illegal profession of drug dealing. Not only teenage pregnancy is dealt with, also pregnancy in a relatively young relationship is topic in this biopic – Charlene and Marcus’ son Antwan is born soon into their relationship. However, instead of focusing on this aspect, Charlene’s pregnancy is employed to show Marcus’ consideration of her aspirations of becoming a dancer as he asks her if she wants to keep the baby. *8 Mile*, contrary to the rather active portrayal of women in *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*, shows women who are unable to change their circumstances on their own (Dyer, *White* 30), they are in many instances reduced to the understanding of a “woman’s power” (Benshoff and Griffin 237) as tied up in her ability to use her body as means of implementing changes. Both Stephanie and Alex use their sensual ‘prowess,’ Alex so that she can leave Detroit behind and start a new life in a more prosperous city, and Stephanie in the sense that she likes sex and finds it an important part of her relationship to Greg.

4.1. “I like the way you movin' girl/ Show me how you do that girl” – the love interests

Due to Hollywood films prioritizing the male action of the story, women are, in comparison, passive and removed from the narrative’s progress (Benshoff and Griffin 237). However, women play an important role concerning the male protagonists as they present further information through their relationship and interaction with the male characters (Bennett et al. 254).

In the biopics, Marcus and B-Rabbit connect with two women on a sexual and, especially in *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*, on an emotional level. Whereas Charlene in *Get Rich or*

Die Tryin' portrays several differing types of femininities, Alex in *8 Mile* is solely the object of desire for B-Rabbit and other male characters. Due to Alex' role as the woman who is "an extension of a male vision" (Nelmes 271) where a rapper would rap the following about her: "I like the way you movin' girl/ Show me how you do that girl" (Lloyd Banks, "Get Low [I Can't]" 00:00:13-00:00:16), two mise-en-scènes depicting her as the ideal representation of what woman is to man (Johnston 349) are the foci of the discussion so as to allow for a thorough understanding of her singular portrayal.

4.1.1. The object of desire

The object of desire within film fulfils the "symbolic equation woman = sexuality" (Mulvey, "Afterthoughts" 14) through their emphasis on the image of the woman as the focus of the male gaze of the protagonists as well as the masculinized spectator, inviting "an identification with a masculine heterosexual desire" (Stacey 455). Especially true is this for Alex in *8 Mile* who is the center of the following analyses.

The first mise-en-scène depicting Alex is only around 30 seconds long, but results in her portrayal as the object of desire to become very clear. At 00:18:29 B-Rabbit stands with his boss Manny by the factory's entrance when a full shot (Studiobinder) of Alex walking towards the pair is framed. Through situating the scene at the factory, the bleak conditions of the lower class are implicitly shown but at the same time allows the chance to observe "how a class acts on screen" (Miller 153) at a distance.

In the shot her short black skirt, red V-neck shirt, pale skin and her blonde hair are highlighted by offering a frontal angle of her – allowing for the spectator's involvement (Kress and van Leeuwen 148) through the camera's gaze as they take on the role of the person looking at the woman. By choosing dark colors her white skin is emphasized and necessitates a critical thinking to dislodge the unconscious assumption of whiteness as the norm (Dyer, *White* 3). In this frame her race is not at the forefront but nevertheless contributes to the domination of white representation in film (1).



Figure 53: Alex as she walks towards Manny and B-Rabbit (00:18:30)

Furthermore, her clothing is coded in such a way that she is “simultaneously looked at and displayed” through the gaze of the camera (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 364). As she reaches Manny and B-Rabbit she asks for John Latourno (00:13:38), her brother, and is taken to him by Manny. She follows B-Rabbit’s boss and the camera follows her, but stays in B-Rabbit’s position so that his point of view conflates with that of the spectator (Nixon 314). At 00:18:56 the camera cuts to a shot of her bare legs in the boots as she walks up the stairs, objectifying her through her reduction to her body parts (White 24) that are representative of male pleasure (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 90).



Figure 54: Close-up of Alex’ legs (00:18:57)

The second mise-en-scène which contains Alex and furthers her depiction as the object of desire begins at 00:33:22 when Alex and her friends leave a club, laughing and happy. She is framed in a medium wide shot (Studiobinder), signifying B-Rabbit’s point of view (Nixon 314), and wears a short skirt. Here, she is the “potential sexual object” (Carrigan et al. 109) for everyone gazing at her through the masculinized camera as “the subject-position offered ... is masculine” (Gledhill and Ball 370).



Figure 55: Alex and her friends leaving the club (00:33:22)

She notices B-Rabbit on the hood of his car and walks towards him. A cut at 00:33:37 frames B-Rabbit in a low angle medium shot (Studiobinder), emphasizing his power (Kress and van Leeuwen 132) over Alex as he watches her coming closer. She moves towards him and sits down next to B-Rabbit on the car which is offered as a low angle medium wide shot (00:33:55; Studiobinder). The low angle focuses especially on her crossed legs, drawing parallels to Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* and puts her body parts again into the foreground as well as the fabrication of gender through these cinematographic decisions (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 173). At the same time, however, the power resides in Alex' because she signifies the "sexual element in 'looking'" (Hall, "Spectacle of 'Other'" 258) – which she is aware of.



Figure 56: Alex sitting next to B-Rabbit (00:33:57)

Her image as the sexual object is further amplified as the camera cuts to an over-the-shoulder shot (Studiobinder) of B-Rabbit looking at her legs and then at her face. She is the ultimate 'body' as it represents the product 'female gender' through her construction as the object of desire in the film (Horner and Keane 4-5).

As B-Rabbit's friends come and say that they will move the party to Winks' home, Alex' walks to her friends to ask if they want to come too. The camera begins with a cowboy shot

(Studiobinder) of her retreating, offering a distanced but personal distance (Kress and van Leeuwen 125) which then pans to her legs, again reducing her to sexualized body parts (White 24; 00:34:49-00:34:52).



Figure 57: Alex' legs as she walks to her friends (00:34:49)

The element of race in this scene is introduced through the construction of difference (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 709): both Alex and B-Rabbit are white and almost alone in their whiteness – presented as the norm as well as ‘nothing’ as it stands for everything (Dyer, *White* 1; “White” 734).

Both mise-en-scènes in *8 Mile* thereby help to paint Alex as the ultimate object of desire who is there to only be looked at and, adding to that, her role within the film does not further the story as she is simply a point of interest for B-Rabbit and other male characters. Charlene, however, is depicted in a different manner. She continues the theme of the object of desire but is afforded more agency and importance to the development of the story. Charlene is Marcus’ childhood friend and as such she already appears in *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* during Marcus’ childhood scenes; however, her first real introduction happens at 00:39:52 where she is an adult and becomes the object of desire for Marcus.

The mise-en-scène opens as Marcus and his crew drive around their neighborhood in Marcus’ new car. With this simple image the issue of class is mentioned through the emphasis on the car as a status symbol. Within the impoverished areas that are prevalent in the film, success is shown through “ostentatious spending habits” (Sköld and Rehn 51).

As they drive through the area, an eye-level full shot (Studiobinder) in a far social distance (Kress and van Leeuwen 125) depicts Charlene and another man as they walk down the pathway. Resulting from the far social distance, it does not become immediately evident what role Charlene will play in the film, however, by the end of the mise-en-scène her importance to Marcus is made clear. A full shot (Studiobinder) of Charlene and her friend walking emphasizes the gaze: the camera takes on the perspective of Marcus and moves with

the car, following her with his gaze and conflates the spectator with Marcus' perspective – and his heterosexual and male characteristics (Ritland 1283) which contributes through these repeated cinematographic decisions to the construction of the masculine and feminine binary (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 42).



Figure 58: Charlene and her friend walking (00:39:53)

By following Charlene with the gaze, the understanding of women to halt the narrative within films is underlined (Benshoff and Griffin 237) – the shots of Marcus going after Charlene do not contribute to the narrative. Because the previous shot framed Marcus in a close-up (Studiobinder) as he looks out of the car, an imaginary relation is made between the two characters as Marcus looks at her (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). At 00:39:59 the camera cuts to a medium shot (Studiobinder) of Charlene crossing the road, and the car's other members notice her as an attractive woman deserving of their attention (Neroni 3). The framing of Charlene therefore is used to focus on her gender role as object of desire (Pajaczkowska 302); Marcus' friend Antwan even gets up to try to get her attention: "Hey, yo! Hey!" (00:40:02-00:40:05). Marcus continues to follow her with his eyes, he gazes at her and imposes his masculine 'point of view' on the mise-en-scène (Mulvey, "Afterthoughts" 12). At 00:40:06 a medium close-up (Studiobinder) of Charlene laughing is shown and results in an intimate closeness of her and the spectator through the framing (Kress and van Leeuwen 148).

Marcus realizes that the woman is Charlene and parks his car to follow her on foot – to talk to her – and results in her being perceived in this instance through her desirability for him (Doane, "Masquerade" 497). This in turn stresses how film can produce assumptions and thoughts through cinematographic design (Colman 324). At 00:40:13 she and her friend are framed in a full shot (Studiobinder) walking down a flight of stairs that cuts to a medium shot (Studiobinder) of Marcus shouting "Charlene!" (00:40:15). As she doesn't hear him, he jogs after her. She finally hears him at 00:40:20; she stops and looks backwards. The low angle framing of this shot (Studiobinder) has the spectator look up to her, she is a standard to aspire

to (Kress and van Leeuwen 132). This cuts to a low angle full shot (Studiobinder) of Marcus walking down the stairs, with the sky in the background (00:40:22) – illuminating him in the process and thereby constructing him as more important than any other person in the mise-en-scène (Dyer, *White* 102).



Figure 59: the illuminated Marcus (00:40:23)

Charlene realizes who it is, and the camera zooms into her face to a close-up (Studiobinder) as she looks up to Marcus (00:40:25), through this cinematographic decision she transports her feelings towards Marcus clearly, she is happy to see him (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). The eye-level close-up (Studiobinder) continues to frame her as she asks, “Marcus?” (00:40:29), and stresses that there is no power difference between her and the spectator (Kress and van Leeuwen 148).



Figure 60: Charlene is happy to see Marcus (00:40:32)

At 00:40:35 a shoulder-level cowboy shot (Studiobinder) shows Marcus and Charlene hugging and Charlene explaining why she is in the neighborhood. When Marcus asks her if she is hungry, she smiles shyly (00:40:53). By showing that Marcus takes the initiative of asking Charlene, sexual difference is portrayed through the mechanism of the cinema (Rodowick 185). The scene then cuts to them eating in a diner and reminiscing about old times (from 00:40:55).

Even though this mise-en-scène depicts Charlene as the object of desire it does so to a less sexualized degree than Alex' portrayal. Charlene is more than her body parts whereas Alex is fractured into her bare legs and sexy clothing. As such, the portrayal of Charlene moves into a more nuanced direction which is further developed by the subsequent mise-en-scène where she is shown to become Marcus' girlfriend.

4.1.2. The girlfriend

In this mise-en-scène Charlene maintains her portrayal as the object of desire but at the same time the scene helps to show the deepening relation between her and Marcus resulting in an emotional connection as she becomes his girlfriend. She is therefore signaled as more than 'just' a sexual object to be looked at.

After connecting again at the previously analyzed scene Charlene and Marcus continue to see each other and together attend a show by the rapper Dangerous. In the club the rival drug 'cartel' starts to shoot, mainly at Marcus, and wound Antwan. Scared from this experience, Charlene asks to stay with Marcus. The mise-en-scène begins at 00:48:42 as they enter the crew's home. It is dark, with only a weak light illuminating the place as they walk to Marcus' room, carrying with it the atmosphere of savagery – both regarding the previous events as well as the crew as they are black men as well as illicit drug dealers involved in shootings (Hall, "Spectacle of 'Other'" 232). At 00:48:55 they both enter Marcus' room where the lighting is warm and allows for a good sense of Charlene's and Marcus' facial expressions, it also structures the home in a binary manner – Marcus' room is 'civilized' and the other rooms are 'savage' which is amplified by the cleanliness of Marcus' room compared to the discarded pizza boxes shown as they entered the crew's home (Hall, "Spectacle of 'Other'" 232). Marcus puts away his rap lyrics notebook – he still dreams of becoming an emcee – so that Charlene has the bed to sleep in, in this instance Marcus interestingly takes on the role of the nurturer, which is usually associated with women (Neroni 13). During his preparation of the bed, Charlene walks towards the windowsill and has a look at the possessions on it. The camera frames her in a close-up (Studiobinder), allowing the spectator an insight into her feelings of interest (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). At 00:49:17 she takes off her jacket, showing off her bare back as the camera offers a shoulder-level cowboy shot (Studiobinder) as she stands by the windows – the camera controls the look, merging the spectator's view with that of the desiring male gaze (Gaines 718).



Figure 61: Charlene removes her jacket (00:49:16)

Marcus readies the bed and Charlene has a look at the framed pictures, finding one of them as young children (00:49:39). This shot shows an extreme close-up (Studiobinder) of Charlene's hands holding the framed image which then cuts to a close-up (Studiobinder) of her face, thereby emphasizing the importance of the picture to her feelings towards Marcus (Kress and van Leeuwen 126).



Figure 62: Charlene holds the picture of her and Marcus (00:49:39)

After he has finished preparing the bed for Charlene, Marcus walks towards the door to let her be on her own but Charlene, without turning around, says: "Don't go" (00:49:50). With this sentence Charlene takes control but also contributes to the view that women are incomplete – and unsafe – without a man (Benshoff and Griffin 289). She puts down the picture and asks Marcus about the first rap song that he recorded for her. The camera frames her from behind in a cowboy shot (Studiobinder) as she begins to sing the first lines and dances to the beat (00:50:02-00:50:04).



Figure 63: Charlene sings their song (00:50:03)

She then turns around and the camera cuts to a close-up (Studiobinder) of her looking at Marcus and continuing to sing. Marcus smiles at Charlene and begins to rap further lines of the song (00:50:10-00:50:17). Here, the shots emphasize the emotions both are feeling towards the other person: emotional closeness (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). On Charlene's insistence he continues with the rap and walks closer to her (00:50:29-00:50:39), by reducing the physical distance he also does the same to the distance between them on an emotional level (125). At 00:50:39 a shoulder-level close-up (Studiobinder) frames both Charlene and Marcus as they stand face to face and then moves away to focus on Marcus' entire face, their emotions at the center of the shot (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). During their reminiscence of the past through the rap song, non-diegetic instrumentals begin to play in a romantic manner and Charlene and Marcus look deep into their eyes (00:50:49); here the music supplies loving emotion to the presented mise-en-scène (Vernon 47).



Figure 64: Charlene and Marcus gaze at each other (00:50:43)

She then asks him if he really is her best friend, just like he rapped in the song, to which he responds that he is more than that (00:50:58) – they become serious and kiss (00:51:00). The camera stays static until it cuts at 00:51:09 to a cowboy shot (Studiobinder) of Marcus' back as

he removes his jacket, giving the spectator the information of what is probably happening next: Marcus and Charlene having sex, the visuals thereby “point to particular interpretations” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2) than can be derived from the removal of the clothing item. The next shot is a close-up (Studiobinder) of them kissing as he lifts Charlene and carries her to bed (00:51:20), focusing on the emotional as well as sexual side of him (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). The camera does not follow them but focuses on the blinds and the sunlight coming through them to then fade into the next scene (00:51:22; Heckmann).



Figure 65: Charlene and Marcus kiss as he lifts her up (00:51:16)

The main effect of this depiction of Marcus’ and Charlene’s relationship is the emphasis on the emotional side of it. Contrary to *8 Mile* where Alex is the sexual vehicle, Charlene offers Marcus emotional connection and also looks for emotional support herself, which extends her characterization from the object of desire to the romantic counterpart of Marcus. As a result, the next mise-en-scène in question shows her being his ‘woman,’ Charlene is more than his girlfriend, she becomes his partner in life.

4.1.3. The woman

Charlene visits Marcus in prison as she is now ‘his woman.’ This is a change from the previously analyzed scene where Charlene and Marcus begin to move their initial relationship into a deeper and more serious emotional relationship as partners.

The mise-en-scène begins at 01:08:31 with a high-angle wide shot (Studiobinder) of the visitation room in prison, establishing the setting and putting Marcus and Charlene into a powerless position compared to the spectator and the prison institution who watch them (Kress and van Leeuwen 148). As such it helps to perpetuate the stereotypical image of the black man in prison who is powerless as well as sensationalized (Kitwana, “Challenge” 439; McCann xi). Charlene and Marcus sit in the middle of the visitation room. From the previous scene Marcus’ rap song “When It Rains It Pours” continues as non-diegetic music until it fades at 01:08:38,

emphasizing that rap continues to be important to Marcus in his life in prison. The camera cuts to a shoulder-level wide shot (Studiobinder) of Charlene and Marcus sitting at the table, in the foreground people walk through the frame.



Figure 66: Marcus and Charlene in the visitation room (01:08:31)

At 01:08:44 the camera frames Charlene in an over-the-shoulder medium close-up (Studiobinder) as she looks at Marcus and asks how he is doing, putting the spectator in the same position as she is – they are “invited to ‘gaze’” at him (Gormley 26). This begins a series of shot-reverse-shots offering medium close-ups (Studiobinder) of both Marcus and Charlene. After a bit of conversation, Charlene asks if Marcus loves her and still is in love with her to which he replies yes (01:09:12-01:09:19) and she tells him that she is pregnant.



Figure 67: Charlene asks Marcus if he still loves her (01:09:12)

This announcement cuts to an over-the-shoulder medium close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus, allowing a thorough insight into his feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 126) as he looks at Charlene and begins to smile (01:09:24). Here non-diegetic instrumental music begins to play, supporting the mise-en-scène with a further emotional aspect (Vernon 47). He asks her if she wants to keep it, to which she nods yes but at the same time asks him insecurely if he wants her to (01:09:39), putting Marcus back into control of her and the narrative (Gledhill and Ball

371; Kimmel, “Masculinity” 136). As he says yes, Charlene smiles happily in the medium close-up (01:09:41; Studiobinder).

At 01:09:56 Marcus lifts his hand to her face to stroke her cheek and Charlene turns her head to kiss his palm, again giving the spectator and insight into their feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen) as well as contrasting Marcus’ “emotional complexity” (hooks, *Real Cool* 140) with hip hop’s image of the rapper as emotionless (57). With this image, the scene ends at 01:10:01.



Figure 68: Charlene kisses Marcus' palm (01:09:58)

Even though the mise-en-scène helps paint a more complex picture of Marcus it also emphasizes Charlene’s importance to his life and the direction it is going to take. She is therefore moved into the position of the mother-to-be which removes further elements of the object of desire from her as the body of the mother and sexuality are not compatible (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 87; Neroni 43). However, instead of continuing to focus on her motherhood, *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* reestablishes her as an active part of the film through her depiction as the fighter.

4.1.4. The fighter

After Marcus’ release from hospital followin the shooting, the family moves to the seaside so that Marcus can work on his rehabilitation. Marcus, however, has lost his drive to rap and is despondent. Charlene allows this for a while but at 01:28:49 she gives him an ultimatum: their family, or his pain. She is ready to fight for their relationship, but only if he rises to the challenge proving to her that he is a man, fighting for his masculinity (hooks, *Black Looks* 87; Ibaseta 68).

The mise-en-scène begins with Charlene in the kitchen and Marcus knocking on the bar to indicate that he needs his pain medication (01:28:49), Charlene is the nurturing carer of the family in this instance (van der Westhuizen 38). She is framed in a shoulder-level cowboy shot (Studiobinder) as she walks to the counter and passes Marcus the vial. The camera moves with

her and focuses on Marcus in a high-angle shot (Studiobinder) as he sits on the couch, he is positioned as, and feels, powerless (Kress and van Leeuwen 148).



Figure 69: Charlene in the kitchen (01:28:50)

Throughout the scene the recorded images are shaky and add to the feeling of insecurity in their relationship (Benshoff and Griffin 4). Charlene looks at Marcus as he prepares the syringe with the morphine. She wears a dark brown hoodie and looks tired and sad (01:29:09). She walks towards the window and the camera follows her to frame her in a shoulder-level medium shot (Studiobinder), keeping a distance to represent the distance between Marcus and Charlene (Kress and van Leeuwen 125). The house they stay in looks cheap and worn down, adding thereby a visualization of the lower class, which, in turn, emphasizes their money struggles as Marcus no longer deals drugs (Brereton 52; Gormley 106).

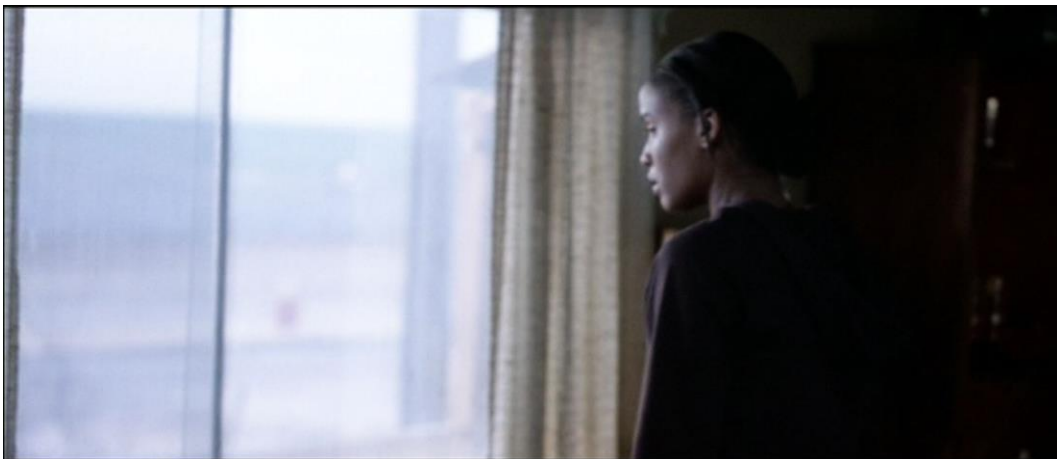


Figure 70: Charlene looks out of the window (01:29:08)

At 01:29:10 the camera cuts to a high-angle extreme close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus hands and the medicine and syringe in them, emphasizing their salience to the frame (Kress and van Leeuwen 176), and then moves to a close-up (Studiobinder) of his face and emotions visible throughout Charlene's subsequent monologue (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). From the off Charlene asks: "Is this it?" (01:29:13), with which she begins her ultimatum to Marcus. She

looks out of the window, framed in a medium shot (Studiobinder) from the left, back side, and then turns to face him. She admits to being lonely (01:29:33) and the camera cuts to a close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus looking at Charlene as she talks; he stays stoic and silent (White 25) whilst she shares her feelings and thoughts with him – she makes herself vulnerable to him and thereby also perpetuates the binary oppositions of emotional = women and estranged from their emotions = men (Peberdy 27; Nixon 294).

At 01:29:59 the camera cuts to a medium shot (Studiobinder) of Charlene by the window as she says: “I feel sorry for your son” (01:30:00-01:30:02), which immediately cuts to a close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus as tears collect in his eyes and roll down his cheeks with her saying, “I don’t want him to see you like this” (01:30:12). By employing the close-up, he reveals his feelings to Charlene’s sentences (Kress and van Leeuwen 126) and breaks with the image of the man as non-emotional (Benshoff and Griffin 205). Marcus gets up and crushes his vials in the sink, but then says, “I can do without anything” (01:30:46), showing that with his masculinity he is independent and can “endure pain and hardship” (Akthar and Hynes 119) – without any help.

He walks into the bedroom and Charlene follows him, she does not give up and thereby subverts the general understanding of women waiting to be rescued (Benshoff and Griffin 203) as she takes an active role in saving their relationship by trying to force Marcus to find his fire again. She is framed in an over-the-shoulder shot (Studiobinder) as she looks at Marcus and asks him if he can do without her (01:30:59). She begs him to talk to her, they both stand close to each other, shown in a shoulder-level medium close-up (Studiobinder), but Marcus stays silent and stoic, and she walks away and grabs Antwan and a blanket (01:31:22). Instead of waiting for him, she acts and contributes to the action of the story as she forces Marcus to do something (Benshoff and Griffin 237).



Figure 71: Charlene takes action to leave (01:31:22)

At 01:31:19 an instrumental piece begins to play. Charlene stops for a few moments at the door to give Marcus time to speak-up as she has not yet given up, but he only watches them and does not say anything as he continues to express his independence and self-control (Kimmel, “Self-Made Man” 138). She opens the door and leaves the house. At 01:31:39 the scene is set outside the house and the camera frames Charlene and Marcus in a full shot (Studiobinder) as she gets ready to leave him, which signals a change in the prevalent depiction of women as subordinate (Doane, “Woman’s Stake” 86). Marcus limps to the car and apologizes to Charlene (01:31:49). The camera cuts to a close-up (Studiobinder) of their faces as they look at each other and Charlene too apologizes: “No, baby. I’m so sorry” (01:31:56-01:31:57), showing her nurturing side (Benshoff and Griffin 205). They both hug at 01:32:04, framed in an over-the-shoulder close-up (Studiobinder) as she succeeds in forcing Marcus to face his fears and start rapping again. She therefore ensures a healthy and normative family consisting of her, Marcus and their son (Kubrin and Weitzer, “Misogyny” 6; Collins 39) – contrary to how Marcus grew up, namely with a mother but no father.



Figure 72: Charlene and Marcus hug after her ultimatum (01:32:04)

4.2. “Did a whole lot of time, caused mom so much hurt” – the mother

Within *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* the role of the mother is an important indicator of the protagonists themselves. In *8 Mile*, B-Rabbit’s relationship with his mother is both fraught and close as she is depicted as an aimless and weak woman who is unable to provide for her family. As a result, B-Rabbit has to take on more responsibility within the family. However, she is a caring mother as well as she takes on B-Rabbit when he breaks up with his girlfriend or when she cooks for him after he was beaten up.

In *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* Marcus’ mother, Katrina, is only a short period present in his life as she is murdered early on. For Marcus, the unsolved murder is an open wound that cannot

heal, however, her lessons and way of raising him continue to influence him. She is depicted as a strong and independent woman who provides for her son and ensures he has everything he could possibly need, with a special focus on the material side. However, it is left open how his mother would have viewed his occupation as a drug dealer where he even has to go to prison. She would probably agree with the following statement: “Did a whole lot of time, caused mom so much hurt” (Spider Loc, “Things Change” 00:00:40-00:00:43), as she took on the dangerous job of dealing drugs to provide for her son and ensure that he might not need to do the same once he grows up.

The first analysis concerns *8 Mile* and with it the femininity of the sexualized mother as whom Stephanie is portrayed in her first depiction, which stands in contrast to the image of the caring mother which serves as the introduction of Katrina in *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*.

4.2.1. The sexualized mother

In the film *8 Mile* women are not the drivers of the action, but rather desired women, the women waiting for something to happen and for someone else to make it happen. This is especially true for Stephanie, B-Rabbit’s mother, who is the embodiment of the desired woman as well as a symbol of inaction (Benshoff and Griffin 237). This is achieved both through her narrative – Stephanie is unemployed, negligent towards her child(ren) and in an unhealthy but sexually active relationship with a much younger man, Greg, who himself is waiting for his insurance money – and her portrayal. Stephanie is waiting with him as she sees the promise of money to better her life, however, this will not come true as her boyfriend leaves her upon receiving the money – leaving her broke, alone and aimless.

The first mise-en-scène establishes Stephanie in her role as a woman of desire – she is signifying male desire (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 364) – which already sets the scene for her subsequent portrayal as a neglectful mother – a mother cannot be at the same time a sexually active woman (Neroni 13) as her motherhood is “given permanent residence ... [in her body] as a dead and deadening part” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 87). The mise-en-scène begins at 00:10:04, with B-Rabbit opening the door to his mother’s trailer – to offer a medium-full shot (Studiobinder) of Stephanie’s naked back as she sits astride her boyfriend and has intercourse with him. Their nakedness signals vulnerability, both physically as well as socially: “Clothes are bearers of prestige” (Dyer, *White* 146) and therefore point to the class issue inherent in the film. Stephanie lives in a trailer home, is unemployed and struggles to provide for her family; she is a negative stereotype of the lower-class woman with the added element of race as she is white and the negative stereotype mainly concerns black women (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 184).



Figure 73: Stephanie sits astride Greg (00:10:04)

Within the mise-en-scène the lighting draws the spectator's gaze towards Stephanie's back, as the only light comes from outside through the window and illuminates her, her blonde hair and her movements (Dyer, *White* 122). Resulting from the illumination of her hair, Stephanie's whiteness is constructed and privileged as a symbol of white power and women's powerlessness within it (30). As she obscures the body of her boyfriend, the body of Stephanie – of the woman to be desired – is in the foreground and places the spectator, through the “‘grammar’ of the story” (Mulvey, “Afterthoughts” 13), with B-Rabbit's gaze and at the same time allows for an identification with her image (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 363).

At first, she does not notice her son arriving, but her boyfriend does and offers a “What the fuck?” (00:10:09), thereby drawing her son's attention towards his naked mother and his mother's attention towards her own nakedness. As soon as she realises this – framed in a medium shot (Studiobinder) – she covers her breasts with her hands and says: “Oh, shit, Rabbit” (00:10:11), but nothing else. In the wake of this sentence, B-Rabbit closes the door behind him as he leaves the trailer again – to wait for his mother outside by sitting on a car. The camera follows him and leaves the spectator with the memory of Stephanie's naked body.



Figure 74: Stephanie notices B-Rabbit (00:10:11)

As a result of this specific framing and effect of the key lighting on Stephanie, the film turns her “into the vehicle for male sexual pleasure” (Neroni 3) both figuratively and literally, she is “presented as what she represents for man” (Johnston 349). This in turn makes it impossible for her to become a maker of meaning (Neroni 28) – she fulfils the role of waiting for a male character, here represented by B-Rabbit – and therefore also the camera – to see her (ibid.). However, Stephanie does not only stand as a symbol for the sexualized mother, she also portrays the role of the carer of the family – similar to Katrina.

4.2.2. The carer of the family

The mise-en-scène portraying Stephanie as the carer of the family, contrary to her earlier depictions as the sexualized mother, takes place after Papa Doc’s crew’s ambush of B-Rabbit. He sits on the porch. At 01:16:22 the camera cuts to a full shot (Studiobinder) of Stephanie dressed in boots, a short skirt, whilst carrying a paper bag as she walks towards the trailer and her son. In this shot she is presented as the perfect “aesthetic ideal” (Ponterotto 135): thin, fit and relatively young.



Figure 75: Stephanie walks towards B-Rabbit (01:16:25)

She asks him what happened and is framed in a close-up (Studiobinder) looking down at B-Rabbit as he lies and tells her that he fell (01:16:42), which allows the spectator to observe her visible emotions (Kress and van Leeuwen 126) of guessing the real reason for his injuries. She responds to this with: “Come on in, I’ll make you something to eat” (01:16:45-46), taking on the role of the caring mother (van der Westhuizen 36). A low angle medium long shot (Studiobinder) shows her opening the door, she is now powerful (Kress and van Leeuwen 148) because she takes on the role of the “woman in the house” (Glapka and Braid x). Inside the trailer the camera cuts to a close-up (Studiobinder) of the paper bag and her hands putting the groceries down onto the counter (01:17:01), furthering her depiction as the nurturing mother in the “private sphere” (van der Westhuizen 31). The camera then pans to a close-up

(Studiobinder) of her rouged face as she continues to unpack the bag. By offering this shot her beauty and the effort into being beautiful are highlighted – “these surfaces ... [therefore reveal] the performative status of the natural itself” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 186) – she performs and fulfils the expectations of the female gender (178). This leads to Stephanie being there to be both looked at as well as displayed as her appearance is “coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 364).



Figure 76: Stephanie coded for erotic impact (01:17:03)

At 01:17:10 she looks towards B-Rabbit and tells him that she won in bingo and they won't be evicted (01:17:26), furthering her depiction as the **white** welfare queen as she continues to depend on 'luck' and support of the state (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 181). The camera stays on her as she fans out the money to show B-Rabbit (01:17:31).



Figure 77: Stephanie fans out the money (01:17:31)

Stephanie lets B-Rabbit share her joy, but she also does not keep her struggles from him, which Katrina tries to do. As such Stephanie does not shield her children of the problems facing the lower class whereas Katrina attempts to do this to a certain extent by ensuring his wellbeing through material items and her love. Even though *8 Mile* depicts the issues of the lower class,

it does so as a ‘spectacle’ which supports the portrayal of the characters, especially Stephanie, but does not support critical analysis of the lower class (Boyd 327).

In Katrina’s first scene she is depicted as the caring mother spending time with her son, Marcus. She is portrayed as caring because she is happy to spend time with her son and she encourages Marcus in his playfulness as he sings – she therefore sustains their relationship as mother and son (van der Westhuizen 38). The mise-en-scène begins at 00:08:19 as a young Marcus and his mother drive together through the city. The first frame is a close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus’ face, allowing an insight into his happiness (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). He looks out of the side window of the car, and his mother is in the background, moving and singing to the upbeat music from the radio. It is diegetic music that supports the positive atmosphere of the scene (Vernon 49). The lighting comes from the front and the sides, illuminating both well.



Figure 78: Marcus looks out of the window (00:08:19)

At 00:08:25 the camera pans to the right and focuses on Katrina as she smiles happily, furthering the image of joy in the frame – which nevertheless has to be interpreted by the spectator (Hall, “Work of Representation” 5): Katrina is joyful as she spends time with her son, she is nurturing him in this moment as she contributes her part to a healthy relationship (Neroni 13).



Figure 79: Katrina smiles happily (00:08:25)

A cut then frames Katrina in an eye-level close-up (Studiobinder) from the front through the windshield, to emphasize her positive feelings (Kress and van Leeuwen 126), and the camera moves slowly to the left and down, to show Marcus as he also sings to the song. 00:08:34 cuts to his mother in a shoulder-level close-up (Studiobinder) as she laughs and expresses her joy. The scene continues to cut between Marcus and Katrina and, as Marcus wonders who his father is, frames two unrealistic father figures as they drive past (00:08:42-00:08:55). The inclusion of Marcus' wondering about his father points towards the film wanting to perpetuate the image of the 'normative family' consisting of a father, a mother, and their child(ren) (Collins 39).



Figure 80: The white father (00:08:46) and the policeman as father (00:08:49) are impossible as fathers to Marcus

The scene ends once Katrina parks the car as they are on their way to Marcus' grandparents' house. In the next scenes Katrina is shown to leave Marcus with her parents as she needs to work – in order to provide for him and get him new sneakers. As such, she makes the sacrifice of spending time with her son on the weekend to earn money for their lifestyle (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 194). Stephanie, contrary to this, is aimless and is not depicted as looking out for her children.

4.2.3. The aimless mother

Stephanie is not only a symbol of the sexualized mother, but she also represents the stuck and aimless mother. The mise-en-scène depicting her as directionless begins at 00:40:46 when Stephanie returns home where B-Rabbit looks after Lily. She is framed in a hip-level shot (Studiobinder) as she closes the door behind her, taking on the point of view of Lily which helps the spectator relate to her – the visual structures thereby help to build 'reality' (Kress and van Leeuwen 47).



Figure 81: Stephanie returns home (00:40:47)

This cuts to a shoulder-level medium shot (Studiobinder) of Stephanie as she forcefully shuts the door with an eviction note in her hand, the spectator is the invisible onlooker on the same level of power (Kress and van Leeuwen 140). She sits down at the dining table and is framed in a close-up (Studiobinder) as she says: “I can’t let Greg find out about this” (00:41:02).

Here, the first indication of her aimlessness is obvious; instead of thinking of herself or her daughter she thinks of Greg as he is her means of “escap[ing] ... domesticity” (Epstein, “Afterword” 301) in the trailer – Greg represents the man in power (Kimmel, “Masculinity” 125) who she regards as the solution to all her material problems.



Figure 82: Stephanie worries about how to hide the eviction note from Greg (00:41:02)

B-Rabbit is not supportive, and he dismisses Greg whilst continuing with his cleaning at the sink. Stephanie turns around to B-Rabbit, framed in a low angle close-up (Studiobinder) which represents her power in this instance compared to the spectator, and partly B-Rabbit as she is the one providing the family with a roof over their heads (Kress and van Leeuwen 148), and states that they have thirty days to come up with the necessary amount of money (00:41:18) and that B-Rabbit needs to contribute.

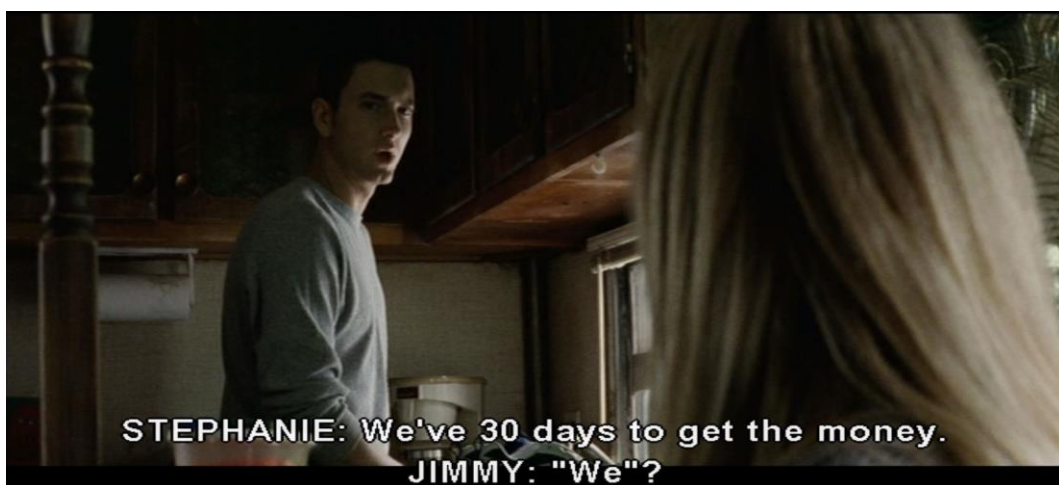


Figure 83: Stephanie includes B-Rabbit in the issue (00:41:18)

B-Rabbit is not happy and tells Stephanie that she should ask Greg for the money, but she responds that she is afraid her asking him would drive him away (00:41:25), to which her son replies: “Mum, you gotta stop living your life like this! If you really cared about Lily, you would get a job and quit fucking around” (00:41:33-00:41:39). Here, B-Rabbit represents society’s view on lower-class women with children who do not do anything to earn money but rather survive on the benefits they receive: the ‘welfare queen’ stereotype (Hester-Williams par. 9). Interestingly, as mentioned above, the ‘welfare queen’ stereotype here is applied to a white woman instead of the usual suspect: poor black women (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 181). The prevalent understanding of black, lower-class women as lazy and single mothers (Hester-Williams par. 9) is thereby deconstructed through Stephanie’s representation of the white ‘welfare queen’ – meaning is shown to be “constantly ... produced and exchanged” (Hall, “Introduction” xix). Stephanie retaliates, framed in a close-up (Studiobinder) to depict her vulnerability and anger (Kress and van Leeuwen 126), by asking B-Rabbit what he is doing with his life that is better in comparison to hers (00:41:48-00:41:50).



Figure 84: Stephanie retaliates (00:41:48)

Throughout the mise-en-scène the monetary struggles of the lower class – and the dominant economic system present (hooks, *Writing Beyond Race* 2) – are presented and therefore highlighted, as well as Stephanie’s aimlessness as she relies on other people in helping her survive. In line with the ‘welfare queen’ stereotype – to which the characteristic of being “sexually irresponsible” (Rose, *Hip Hop Wars* 181) belongs – Stephanie’s next femininity depicts her open understanding of sex.

4.2.4. The uninhibited white woman

In one instance in the film, race is mentioned concerning ‘passing’ – when a black person’s skin appears sufficiently white that they are regarded by white people as being white, which therefore contributes to their positive treatment by society as “lighter is always better”

(hooks, *Writing Beyond Race* 14). The scene begins at 00:48:52 with a close-up (Studiobinder) of Stephanie's toes as she paints them pink which emphasizes her womanhood and erotic appeal (Brinckmann 71). The close-up and resulting gaze through the camera establish Stephanie as a spectacle (Johnston 349) in which she signifies male desire through the use of the color pink (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 364).



Figure 85: Stephanie as the spectacle (00:48:52)

In the background, a diegetic dialogue of the film *Imitation of Life* can be heard. The camera pans to focus on Stephanie's face, she is clothed in a pale rose dressing gown, which again emphasizes her femininity (Brinckmann 71), and smells the nail polish. A cut then focuses on the film which shows in that moment the scene in which Sarah Jane, passing as white, is visited by her black mother at school, thereby marking the young girl as black. The decision of incorporating the film within *8 Mile* could be to show that whiteness is seen as the (invisible) norm and therefore enables white people to be in control (Dyer, *White* 1, xxxiii) whereas, in hip hop, being white is a hindrance. B-Rabbit therefore has to appropriate and internalize black culture in order to 'pass' as sufficiently black for hip hop (Stadler 154).



Figure 86: Stephanie watches Sarah Jane as she hides from her black mother (00:49:04)

B-Rabbit arrives at that point back home and removes his jacket. Stephanie screws the lid back on the nail polish and begins to talk to B-Rabbit about her relationship problems with Greg (00:49:35), she has internalized that women should “see themselves as incomplete without a man” (Benshoff and Griffin 289). By employing this scene it is suggested that she has no real interest besides men (Neroni 42) – including work.

As a result of Stephanie’s topic, B-Rabbit asks if their problems are related to the eviction note during which he is framed in a low angle medium shot (Studiobinder) to imply that B-Rabbit is more powerful compared to Stephanie and the spectator (Kress and van Leeuwen 140) because he knows about the eviction note and can therefore potentially blackmail his mother into telling her boyfriend. However, a cut to a close-up (Studiobinder) of Stephanie lifts the issue in their relationship: “It’s our sex life” (00:49:47-00:49:48). B-Rabbit is shown to look scandalized and responds with: “Mum, I don’t wanna hear about this shit” (00:49:50-51).



Figure 87: B-Rabbit tells his mother to stop talking about her sex life (00:49:49)

He then walks to the bathroom, with Stephanie following him. As she follows B-Rabbit she transports her anxiety regarding the sexual issue in her relationship and once again emphasizes her focus on the male and internalized understanding of women as sexual objects for them (Carrigan et al. 109). Once B-Rabbit is in the bathroom Stephanie, framed in a medium close-up (Studiobinder), stands in the door with cold light from the bathroom’s bulb and tells him that Greg won’t go down on her (00:49:57) to which B-Rabbit shouts “Mum!” (00:49:59) and closes the door. His closing of the door is symbolic of the “patriarchal surveillance of women’s bodies” (Glapka, “Piece of Meat” 87) as he controls the information presented to him and suggests that women’s sexuality is scandalizing and should not be discussed. This action thereby contributes to the continued perception that women are seen by society as in need of vigilance by men (McCabe 9; Keane 32). Contrary to *8 Mile*, *Get Rich Or Die Tryin’* focuses

on the negative treatment of women through the promise that Marcus has to make to Katrina to always stay respectful towards women.



Figure 88: B-Rabbit shuts the door on his mother and the topic (00:49:59)

4.2.5. The feminist

As a contrast to the ‘weak’ femininity displayed by Stephanie, Katrina is portrayed as a strong woman who is aware of the problems that women have to face. She therefore tries to instill respect towards women in Marcus. She especially shows her feminist side when she hears Marcus rap a song which prompts her to have Marcus promise her that he will always treat the girls and women correct. The scene begins at 00:11:02 with the diegetic music of Marcus rapping his song “Best Friend” for Charlene. A low angle shot (Studiobinder), which makes Katrina powerful compared to both the spectator and Marcus (Kress and van Leeuwen 140), frames her as she walks down the stairs in her light rose nightgown – which introduces her erotic appeal (Brinckmann 71) within the scene as well. As Marcus is her son, the decision to focus on her nightgown in the mise-en-scène points to the camera serving a masculinized gaze (Mulvey, “Afterthoughts” 12) that also highlights the issue of the production of the “category of ‘women’” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 5) through culturally constructed norms: rose is feminine, and the nightgown is feminine, therefore Katrina = femininity.



Figure 89: Katrina as she walks down the stairs (00:11:08)

The light in the *mise-en-scène* is diffuse as it is nighttime, but light from above falls onto Katrina as she walks, and the camera continues to frame her, with characteristics generally associated with the male gaze – the focus on her nightgown or appearance, – making her an object of desire (Ritland 1286; Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 363). Until 00:11:09 the camera stays static, but once it frames Katrina in a low angle medium shot (Studiobinder) it pans to stay with her as she walks to the living room, offering at the end of the stairs a high angle shot (Studiobinder), reversing the power hierarchy from before to put the spectator into a position of power (Kress and van Leeuwen 140). From 00:11:09 to 00:11:13 the lighting is soft but strong enough to emphasize her light pink nightgown and expression of attention, highlighting her attractiveness as a “sexy woman” (Bucciferro 172) to the spectator.



Figure 90: Katrina listens to Marcus (00:11:12)

At 00:11:13 the camera offers a wide shot (Studiobinder) which focuses on Katrina as she listens to Marcus in the living room, who is unfocused in the frame. Silently she leans on the wall to hear what Marcus says in his rap. A cut at 00:11:20 offers a low angle close-up (Studiobinder) of Marcus rapping into the microphone: “If I was your best friend, I’d want you around all the time” (00:11:19-00:11:20); he gives an insight into his feelings towards Charlene (Kress and van Leeuwen 126). The camera stays on Marcus, but at 00:11:24 it focuses on Katrina’s bare legs as she comes from behind the wall and walks to Marcus. Warm lighting comes from behind her and bathes her legs in its light, emphasizing their sexual allure as symbols of the “canonical female body” (Ponterotto 135) – fit and well-toned, unblemished, young.



Figure 91: Katrina's legs (00:11:25)

Marcus realizes he is no longer alone and stops his rap to look up. The camera pans with him to move up Katrina's legs to her face, sexualizing her in the process which stresses the phallogentric perspective (Ritland 1283) and finally frames her in a low angle shot (00:11:30; Studiobinder), the spectator and Marcus 'look up to' her (Kress and van Leeuwen 132). A short conversation between Marcus and his mother ensues about him being up very late which is shown in a shot-reverse-shot (Studiobinder). However, she does not tell him off but asks him about the best friend he was rapping about (00:11:42-00:11:43) and Marcus finally says, "a girl" (00:11:50). His mother moves from her position at the wall to the couch where Marcus sits and crouches down to be on his level (00:11:53-00:11:58) and to be closer to him as the camera puts Marcus in the subjective position (Miller 152). She has Marcus promise her that he will always treat the girls and women 'right' (00:12:02-00:12:06). The camera cuts to a wide shot (Studiobinder) of Marcus and his mother sitting and looking at each other as he promises to be respectful of women (00:12:09).



Figure 92: Katrina as she crouches down (00:11:57)

In this mise-en-scène the story portrays Katrina as a woman who is aware of the "heterosexual male dominance over women" (Kubrin and Weitzer, "Misogyny" 5) and wants

to make sure that her son does not contribute to the perpetuation of this system of domination (hooks, *Real Cool* 52). However, the framing and camera angles suggest to the spectator a more sexualized image of Katrina that stands in contrast to the content of the story. As a result, the mise-en-scène positions two contrastive images of Katrina – on the one hand the image of the feminist and on the other hand the image of the sexualized woman. Nevertheless, Katrina is portrayed throughout the film as a strong woman, especially when considering her defense of her drug dealing territory.

4.2.6. The territorial dealer

In the subsequently analyzed mise-en-scène Katrina sees another dealer at her spot, becomes angry and confronts him to protect her territory, marking it with her actions. This scene is connected to the mise-en-scène analyzed in Majestic's introduction as this shows the beginning of the fight that Majestic then ends in his first scene.

The scene begins at 00:12:23 with Katrina and Marcus driving in the car and listening to music when a medium close-up (Studiobinder) of Katrina behind the steering wheel shows her seeing something she is not happy about (00:12:23; Kress and van Leeuwen 126). A cut to a wide shot (Studiobinder) of Slim, the dealer, and his customers shows the spectator what Katrina glimpsed (00:12:24) and why she is angry.



Figure 93: Katrina sees Slim (00:12:23) as he deals in her spot (00:12:24)

The camera then frames Katrina in her car in a medium shot (Studiobinder) through the side window, which puts her into a social distance of the spectator (Kress and van Leeuwen 148), with her saying: “Fucking Slim. What’s he doing here?” (00:12:26-00:12:28). Katrina parks her white car – which symbolizes her success (Sköld and Rehn 51) – to confront Slim; with the dealer and some customers in the unfocused foreground; and gets out of the car (00:12:35). Throughout the mise-en-scène the radio music, which Marcus and Katrina listened to, continues to play, overlaid with diegetic sounds of cars driving by which emphasizes the realistic setting of the scene (Vernon 47; Bennett et al. 14).

The mise-en-scène is set by the street underneath a bridge which helps to protect the people from the elements to a certain degree but is also a strategic point through its proximity to public transport. By deciding on this setting, the conditions of the inner cities in the 1980s

through processes of deindustrialization (Rose, *Black Noise* 25) are shown and therefore also the issues the lower class faced. Especially black people and other ethnic groups were failed by politics during that time (White 39) and thereby had to rely on illegal/ other means to survive, for example drug dealing on the streets (Neal, “Postindustrial” 369). However, even though the setting points to the depiction of class, the focus rather lies in Katrina and Slim, two black people, fighting over their spot – and race therefore overshadows class, as it often does (Collins 179; Michaels 3).



Figure 94: Katrina's spot in the inner city (00:12:29)

Katrina walks towards Slim and is framed in a wide shot (Studiobinder); at first the lighting is very weak, making it hard to see her in detail (00:12:36-00:12:37) which could point to the fact that the spectator is up to this point ignorant regarding her aggressive performance of masculinity (Ćuk 138) depicted in this scene.



Figure 95: Katrina walks towards Slim (00:12:37)

At 00:12:42 she reaches Slim and his customer and asks him what he is doing, he responds that he is “handling [his] business” (00:12:44). Katrina becomes angry and shoves Slim away from the customer. As Katrina is in the business of dealing drugs, she adopts the

forceful characteristics of the ‘marketplace masculinity’ (Kimmel, “Masculinity” 124) where she aggressively protects her territory.



Figure 96: Katrina shoves Slim (00:12:47)

00:12:47 shows Slim in a high-angle close-up (Studiobinder) as he walks into dog excrements from the force of Katrina’s shove. This underlines Katrina’s masculinity and supports Judith Butler’s statement that “gender is a kind of persistent impersonation” (*Gender Trouble* xxviii), as Katrina takes on characteristics usually associated with male characters. In this shot the spectator is furthermore no longer in an involved position but rather views everything from above (Kress and van Leeuwen 126), the camera pans up and settles on Slim in a medium shot (Studiobinder) as he angrily says, “I got shit on my boot, bitch” (00:12:48-00:12:50). By employing derogative terms to speak to Katrina, Slim both refers to the “maintenance of derogatory stereotypes” (McCabe 52), for example of women as immoral and bad (Collins 109), as well as to rap and film’s understanding of women as subjugated and signifying male desire (Carrigan et al. 111; Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 364).

Katrina continues to angrily shout at the people who want to buy drugs from Slim and has them leave the area, she therefore exerts her adopted performance of domination (Conway-Long 71) by forcing everyone to go away. This enrages Slim and they start a physical altercation (00:12:50) which Majestic finally breaks up.



Figure 97: Katrina forces customers to go away (00:12:50)

Throughout the mise-en-scène Katrina is a force to be reckoned with as she stays her ground and defends the territory. As a result, she is not portrayed as a woman in need of protection (Benshoff and Griffin 203) but rather as an active person expressing aggressive masculinity (Nixon 309). This helps construct the femininities in *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* in a more varied and positive manner compared to *8 Mile*.

5. [Outro]

In conclusion, the films *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* portray differing masculinities and femininities that depend both on the character and their role within the storyline as well as on expectations about the type of masculinity and femininity. These, in turn, are highly dependent upon the construction of gender (see Butler, *Gender Trouble*).

In *8 Mile* the masculinities are portrayed as the strong and active male in the story (Benshoff and Griffin 203) whereas the femininities – and therefore the women – are portrayed as dependent and weak, however, also as strong in their sexuality (Benshoff and Griffin 205, 210). When analyzing the fictionalized biopic, it therefore quickly becomes apparent that the main focus lies on B-Rabbit and his struggles with his mother; his object of interest and his antagonist are only depicted in the film to help his portrayal as man because “the struggle and tension men have to face on a regular basis ... [help] to prove that they ‘qualify’ as men” (Ibaseta 68). These struggles are furthermore developed through the intersection of race and class constructions within the film: B-Rabbit faces problems on his way of becoming a respected emcee as he is white and therefore a threat to the black culture of hip hop (Hess, “Hip-Hop Realness” 375). This issue is shown through the hostility he faces in The Shelter and from other rappers in Detroit who also explicitly tell him to go back across the 8 Mile Road – “the racial borderline” (Hasted 9). Added to race, B-Rabbit belongs to the lower class – he and his mother struggle to provide for the family. However, class does not separate B-Rabbit further from the rap community, instead it helps to find a common ground where he can be accepted, class trumps race (Hess, *From Bricks* 103). This ‘triumph’ of class over race is emphasized towards the end of the film where B-Rabbit takes his whiteness and lower-class status to use against himself and against his opponent, Papa Doc; showing the audience that class is more relevant in their city than race.

Papa Doc, who serves as the antagonist in *8 Mile*, depicts the masculinities of the fighter, the boss and the bully; all three of these powerful portrayals (Peberdy 109). However, at the same time these masculinities intersect with race in such a way that they contribute to hegemonic expectations of black masculinity as problematic and hypermasculine (Hall, “Whites of their Eyes” 102; White 29). Papa Doc is the savage black man (Hall, “Spectacle of ‘Other’” 232) who is violent in both his raps and conduct. This becomes especially clear in the mise-en-scène in which he threatens B-Rabbit with a gun. The firearm is used as a symbol of domination (Nama 77) and contributes to Papa Doc’s dangerous, aggressive and hostile portrayal (Dunbar 5).

Concerning the women in the film, their femininities are reduced to sexualized and weak portrayals that relate to gangsta and hardcore rap's misogyny (Rose, *Black Noise* 104). B-Rabbit's mother, Stephanie, is unable to move forward in her life and is not able to see herself as worthy without the support of a man (Benshoff and Griffin 289) whereas Alex, the object of desire, uses her sexual appeal to her advantage as she wants to leave Detroit behind for New York City – her sexual pleasure, however, is “constructed around her objectification” (Kaplan 126) and thereby reduces her power as a woman. As a result of these portrayals, *8 Mile* contributes to hardcore and gangsta rap's understanding of women as untrustworthy (Vito 20) – Alex ‘betrays’ B-Rabbit when she has sex with Wink – and uninhibited (Neroni 42) – both Alex and Stephanie are free with their bodies and sex and therefore represent the hypersexualized woman. These depictions are developed through the male gaze of the film – Alex and Stephanie portray each a role who “holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire” (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 364) and thereby the film constructs the female gender as weak and sexualized through its structure of portrayal (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 5). Interestingly, *8 Mile* only depicts white women in the role of the sexualized woman who serves as the object of desire for the masculinized gaze (Gledhill and Ball 370). Resulting from this, whiteness is constructed as the norm (Dyer, *White* 1), the white woman is to be desired because she is the heterosexual body through which desire is transported (25).

Get Rich or Die Tryin' then develops both Marcus and his antagonist, Majestic, in more depth than *8 Mile*'s Papa Doc and shows them to portray differing masculinities – not all dependent upon the strong man. Especially Majestic is an interesting character as he starts out as the protector and father figure to Marcus but then becomes the antagonist to Marcus as he wants to become an emcee instead of supporting Majestic in his drug business.

Marcus' masculinities are highly dependent upon his surroundings – as the drug dealer he is the dominant man (Carrigan et al. 113), and with Charlene he is the lover who provides and protects his family (Akthar and Hynes 124). As such, hegemonic expectations of black masculinity are fulfilled as well as subverted, proving Stuart Hall's statement of race as the floating signifier: “And those things [such as race] gain their meaning ... in the shifting relations of difference (“Floating Signifier” 362). The black man is often depicted in Hollywood films as the violent man situated in the ghetto (Erigha 115) which is true for *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* – both Marcus and Majestic live in the ‘ghetto’ and are fierce in their pursuit of material gain (Kajikawa 112), they are the violent gangsters who “promote a black macho-criminalist ethic” (Benshoff and Griffin 92) – introducing in their depiction furthermore the class struggle of the black community in leaving behind the dire living conditions through drug dealing (Klein und

Friedrich 86). As such, in these instances, the negative stereotype of the dangerous – and poor – black man is furthered (Hall, “Work of Representation” 17), underlining the fact that “the media exist in a very close, sympathetic relationship to power and established values” (“Black Men” 51).

The women are more independent and stronger compared to *8 Mile*: Marcus’ mother is caring and loving as well as a territorial defender of her drug dealing spot. She is therefore not only depicting different femininities but shows that women are able to portray masculine characteristics of aggression and competitiveness (Nixon 294). Charlene, the object of desire to Marcus, continues with the image of the strong woman. She begins as the object of desire but transforms into Marcus’ partner throughout the film, she shows this especially in the *mise-en-scène* where she gives Marcus an ultimatum concerning their relationship. Charlene is therefore not dependent upon her sexuality to change her life and is neither incomplete without a man but stands next to him as a strong member of their family. As a result, *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* contributes to the misogynistic portrayal of women in gangsta and hardcore rap not with the two main women, but rather with the depiction of the supporting women, who are there as sexual objects (Neroni 1) that do not contribute anything else except their sexual allure. However, the film does frame both Katrina and Charlene in a sexualized manner that highlights their femininity and sexuality (Johnston 349), even though to a less obvious degree than *8 Mile*.

In general, *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* continue the perpetuation of the portrayal of the male hero (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure” 365) through their storyline and reduce the women, to differing extents, to the objects of desire for the spectator. For more in-depth analysis of each depiction further analysis and research is necessary, especially as more women than Alex, Stephanie, Katrina and Charlene are portrayed in the films and the main characters are shown in additional different masculinities. A complete analysis and interpretation, however, would have exceeded this thesis and remains open for future studies.

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7. Appendix

7.1. English Abstract

Rap music, and with it hardcore and gangsta rap, was born alongside three other pillars of hip hop in the 1970s and continues to be popular and therefore commercially powerful. Rap music is listened to by millions of people, young and old, and influences how they perceive the world. This is also true for film, where ideological meanings are transported through cinematographic decisions and the film's storyline. As such, the combination of rap music and film holds enormous potential for perpetuating gender and race stereotypes. Therefore, the two rap biopics *8 Mile* and *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* are the focus of this thesis – and with it their portrayal of gender and perpetuation of hegemonic expectations regarding race and class.

This thesis therefore investigates how masculinities and femininities are portrayed and draws upon Judith Butler's gender theory and Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. For this, selected mise-en-scènes are analyzed to give answer to the construction of gender as well as the objectification of female roles through the male gaze of the camera. Furthermore, Hollywood film and its role in the perpetuation of the problematic depiction of femininity present in hardcore and gangsta rap is examined. Here, comparisons to rap's stereotypes are made that are based on Laura Mulvey's theory as well as on feminist theory. The third question asked in this thesis concerns how masculinities and femininities relate to hegemonic expectations about black masculinity. Regarding this question, Stuart Hall and his theory on race as a floating signifier is important to help deconstruct these hegemonic expectations. Finally, the intersection of forms of masculinity and femininity with race and class constructions is analyzed, which depends upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory on intersectionality.

The thesis shows that the masculinities and femininities present in the films depend upon normative constructions of the male and female and thereby perpetuate these through the medium of film and music. Furthermore, hegemonic expectations about black masculinity are fulfilled and contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes regarding black people, which are often negatively connotated. Race plays an important role as it underlines the unconscious ideological meaning within films that black people are dangerous and bad and overshadows issues concerning class constructions.

The thesis therefore shows that films and hip hop music transport a significant ideological meaning within their medium and help to shape the world according to these views. As such, further research is necessary to uncover the ways in which these hegemonic expectations can be deconstructed and changed.

7.2. German Abstract

Rap Musik und seine Genres Hardcore und Gangsta Rap entwickelten sich gleichzeitig mit drei weiteren Ausdrucksformen von Hip Hop in den 1970er Jahren. Seit den 1980ern ist Rap in weiten Teilen der Bevölkerung beliebt und somit auch kommerziell sehr bedeutend. Durch seine Beliebtheit ist es Rap möglich, die Art und Weise zu beeinflussen wie seine Hörer*innen die Welt sehen – so auch Film. Film transportiert bestimmte Ideologien über die kinematographischen Entscheidungen und seiner Handlung. Infolgedessen ist die Kombination von Rap und Film bedeutend für die Aufrechterhaltung von ‚gender‘ und ‚race‘ Stereotypen. Aus diesem Grund sind die zwei Rap-Filmbiografien *8 Mile* und *Get Rich or Die Tryin‘* Fokus dieser Arbeit – und damit auch die Darstellung und Aufrechterhaltung von vorherrschenden Erwartungen betreffend ‚gender,‘ ‚race‘ und Klasse.

Aus diesem Grund analysiert die Arbeit, wie Maskulinitäten und Femininitäten in den Filmen dargestellt werden und stützt sich hierbei auf Judith Butlers ‚gender‘-Theorie und Laura Mulveys Theorie des männlichen Blickes. Hierzu werden ausgewählte Szenen analysiert, um Antworten zu der Konstruktion von ‚gender‘ sowie der Objektivierung von weiblichen Rollen durch den männlichen Blick geben zu können. Weiters wird ermittelt auf welche Weise Hollywood Filme die problematische Darstellung von Femininität in Hardcore und Gangsta Rap bewahrt. Hier wird auf Laura Mulveys Theorie und der feministischen Filmtheorie zurückgegriffen. Außerdem ist es wichtig zu bestimmen, inwiefern Maskulinitäten und Femininitäten mit hegemonischen Erwartungen zu schwarzer Maskulinität in Verbindung stehen. Hierfür wird auf Stuart Halls Theorie zu ‚race‘ als variabler Signifikant zurückgegriffen. Zuletzt wird die Intersektionalität von Maskulinität und Feminität mit ‚race‘ und Klasse anhand von Kimberlè Crenshaws Theorie der Intersektionalität analysiert.

Diese Arbeit zeigt, dass Maskulinitäten und Femininitäten in den Filmen auf normative Konstruktionen von ‚gender‘ beruhen und diese durch Film und Musik aufrechterhalten. Außerdem werden hegemonische Erwartungen von schwarzer Männlichkeit erfüllt und erlauben somit die Erhaltung von Stereotypen bezüglich schwarzer Personen, oftmals negativ konnotiert. ‚Race‘ spielt also eine wichtige Rolle da sie die unbewusste, ideologische Meinung von schwarzen Menschen als gefährlich und schlecht weiterführt und gleichzeitig die Problematik von Klasse überdeckt.

Somit zeigt diese Arbeit, dass Filme und Rap Musik ideologischen Ideen und Ansichten aufrechterhalten und einen Beitrag leisten, wie die Welt gemäß von normativen Ansichten zu sehen ist. Daher sind weitere Untersuchungen notwendig, um diese Vorgehensweisen sichtbar zu machen und sie dekonstruieren und verändern zu können.