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IDENTITY AND HIP-HOP: AN ANALYSIS OF EGO-FUNCTION IN *THE COLLEGE
DROPOUT* AND *THE MISEDUCATION OF LAURYN HILL*

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I will be analyzing how Kanye West and Lauryn Hill create identity for themselves and their listeners in the albums *The College Dropout* and *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, respectively. Identity creation will be analyzed using Richard Gregg's concept of ego-function. By applying the three stages of the theory – victimization of the ego, demonization of the enemy, and reaffirmation of the ego – to both albums, I hope to uncover the ways that both West and Hill contribute to identity creation. I also discuss the ways in which they create identity that cannot be explained by ego-function theory. I also briefly address the following questions: (1) How does the language of ego-function differ between the artists? (2) How does their music speak to listeners of different ethnicities? (3) What role does gender play in ego-function? Does the language of ego-function differ between genders?

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Ah, music,” he said, wiping his eyes. “A magic beyond all we do here!”

- J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

Music is one of the only inventions that seems to have been created for pleasure rather than out of necessity. Perhaps it was this rare quality of luxury that made it an integral thread in humanity’s weave for the next 40,000 years (Barras). In the same way that love has been a topic of fascination for as long as we know, music, too, has been regarded with awe. “A person who...does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being,” said Martin Luther. “He should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hog.” That was in 1583 (Ellis). It is evident that from the beginning of modern humanity, music has been one of the most elementary facets of personhood. It is as if music is an inevitable extension of the self – another arm or leg growing out of the body that is equally contributive to one’s sense of self.

Music, I think, is so effortlessly relevant partly because of its ability to construct an identity for its listeners. “Music can help define and shape our identities through two vantage points: self-understanding, and self-other understanding” says Brent Talbot. In other words, music helps to construct how we understand ourselves as individuals as well as how we are understood by others. Both of these vantage points are at play in places like Burkina Faso, for example, where a woman planning to bear a child will meditate until she “hears the song of the

child she will conceive.” The song is then sung as the woman and her husband make love, as the woman is giving birth, when the child gets married later in life, and finally when he or she dies (Fitzpatrick). Basically, an individual’s song is a lifelong marker of the individual, equally as present during major life events as other identity-creating forces like family. Although this linkage of song and identity may look different in other cultures, it is equally as strong across cultures and regions. According to Frank Fitzpatrick, “As youth, we often chose our circles of friends by the kind of music that most resonated with us and sometimes came to idolize - maybe even imitate - the artists who created that music” (Cantor). In other words, we quite literally model our identities – how we act and who we surround ourselves with – through song. This effect can be even more pronounced when adolescents “hold expectations about the values and characteristics of fans of certain kinds of musical styles” and create labels for themselves and their peers based on musical preferences (Fitzpatrick). And this doesn’t stop after puberty: the University of Glasgow and the Scottish Music and Health Network have performed studies that have found that the music people identify with during their teens becomes the music that “stays” with them throughout life, creating nostalgia in later years that connects them back to their sense of self and “to the community of friends who share those musical preferences” (Fitzpatrick).

Not only does music create a personal identity for individuals themselves, but it is also an equally powerful contributor to cultural identity. The creation of cultural identity through music often occurs as a way to restore culture when the culture is for some reason degraded. For example, "When a Latino crosses the U.S./Mexico border, they automatically start to assimilate culturally, and a big part of that assimilation comes in the form of musical tastes, which transform to the dominant culture," says Jorge Andrés Herrera. When this transformation goes too far, a person under these circumstances will use music from their home culture to “reconnect

with their true selves. They even go so far as to rank each other's cultural identity using the type of Mexican music the person listens to. "If you are a 'hard-core Mexican,' you listen to narco corridos. If you are really hard-core, you listen to corridos alterados. If you listen to Vicente Fernández too often, you are a "paisa," but if you only listen to his music occasionally you are not a true Mexican" (Morena). In other words, the type of music you listen to can literally determine how your cultural identity is labeled.

In some cases, music and sound shape identity because of their roles as forms of rhetoric. Rhetoric is defined by Herrick as "The systematic study and intentional practice of effective symbolic expression. *Effective* here will mean achieving the purpose of the symbol-user, whether that purpose is persuasion, clarity, beauty, or mutual understanding" (8). Music and sound can be considered rhetorical because they use symbols to create meaning, they communicate a message, and they persuade. Music uses symbols to create meaning in a way that is different from written or spoken rhetoric in that it is nondiscursive. Chuang posits that music's nondiscursive nature allows for creation of meaning through an aesthetic symbol system. "Music is a significant form that can express a virtual experience that language is unfit to express," she says. Langer also argues that music conveys meaning and emotion through aesthetic symbolism. She says that what allows the music to depict feeling are the patterns of intensity and release that symbolize the intensity-release rhythm of human experiences. In other words, the lack of spoken or written rhetoric clears the way for sensory symbolism. This symbolism creates meaning in a way that can be more powerful than discursive rhetoric. Music can also be considered rhetorical because of its ability to communicate a message. For example, most protest songs tend to function as "in-group" messages (Sellnow). And finally, music can be considered rhetoric because it fulfills rhetoric's most widely-known function: persuasion. According to Sellnow, music can effectively

persuade nonmembers to accept an argument as legitimate in multiple ways. For example, it can simultaneously offer incongruent messages to create meaning through irony.

Musical rhetoric acts as an identity builder: When musical rhetoric promotes identity formation, it's not the act of listening to the music itself that forms identity (like the examples of Burkina Faso and Mexican culture), it's the rhetoric found in the music that achieves this function. But in order to establish musical rhetoric's ability to create identity, we must draw on its more fundamental argument: sound creates identity. According to Gunn, Goodale, Hall, and Eberly, "Soundscape scholars argue that humans not only make sense of individual sounds, but make sense of those sounds in a context that both gives meaning to the environment and informs the construction of our identities." An example of such a sound is the nineteenth-century church bells in rural areas. The people who can hear the ring of a particular bell can be certain that they are members of that bell's community. "The ringing thus helped residents to make sense of their own sonic environments" (Gunn, Goodale, Hall, Eberly). The researchers go on to say that the specific sounds that characterize an environment produce "acoustic territories" that generates a sense of unity for those who occupy that environment. This is a particularly powerful source of collective identity production because sounds are constantly pervading our society, thereby impacting broad audiences.

Now that we have seen that music can be considered rhetoric, and that sound alone creates identity, we can build on those arguments to establish musical rhetoric's ability to create identity. As Hurner says, quite simply, "Music stands for, symbolizes, and offers the immediate experience of collective identity." The collective identity produced by music is operationalized by Sellnow as "attitudes and values held by various groups within the general population." How does music produce these attitudes and values? It creates a common goal through the

“articulation of a need for social transcendence” (Matula). Protest music can also produce in-group cohesion by “reinforcing ideology” (Sellnow), which ensures that the group is fighting for the same goal and united under the same values.

Some types of music more frequently achieve identity creation through rhetoric than others. Perhaps the strongest example of this type of music is hip-hop. Hip-hop was “born” on November 11, 1973, when a man named Afrika Bambaata established Zulu Nation, an organization whose mission was to replace street violence with battles of DJ-ing, break dancing, rapping, and graffiti. Rap is considered one of four elements of hip hop, which are: rap (the spoken element), DJ-ing (the musical element), break-dancing (the dance element), and graffiti (the visual element). Rap stems from African griots, which were the storytellers of African tribes. The griot tradition spread through slavery to the African Diaspora. In the United States, this tradition evolved into the delivery of oral poetry called toasts that were recited in places like pool halls and local jails. The misogynistic nature of such toasts limited their popularity to places frequented only by Black men. Male radio hosts carried the tradition into their work by making similar toasts over music on the air. This was the gateway to the birth of rap music: when the term “rap” emerged it was used to describe the toast-inspired spoken interludes in R&B records. Soon, artists were combining poetry with percussion-based music, eventually giving way to rap music as we know it (Bynoe).

Meanwhile, another important development was occurring. Sampling, a technique that takes parts of pre-existing songs and alters them to create a beat for a new song, surfaced in the 1970’s as well. This pillar of rap music has its roots in the African oral tradition of “signifyin,” which entails the use of previously recorded songs to “create new meanings that either compliment or critique a situation in an indirect way” (Young). Both rap and sampling grew in

popularity until 1979 when “Rapper’s Delight” by Sugar Hill Gang became the first rap record to be featured on the Billboard Top 40, and “Christmas Rappin’” by Kurtis Blow became the first rap record to be released by a major record label. Soon, the major names we know now emerged: Jay-Z, P. Diddy, and Biggie Smalls established themselves and began influencing the spread of rap’s popularity across the country (Bynoe).

We have seen that rap has its origins in the male-dominated tradition of toasts, which most likely shaped the male domination of the entire genre from its start. Although small in number, female hip-hop artists have established an influential presence in the genre. While this is true, they have not been an exception to the struggle for female equality in its many forms. One form of inequality experienced by female hip-hop artists is the recognition of female rappers’ accomplishments as accomplishments only when compared to other females. In fact, the discussion of female artists’ skills has almost always made use of the word “female” as a qualifier (McGlynn). A second example of gender inequality in hip-hop has been the limitation of female artists to occupy only certain roles. “The world of hip-hop has not been open to a large number of different interpretations of women’s personalities” (Hirji). In fact, women in hip-hop have had to be either “hard” (excessively masculine), or rely entirely on overt sexuality in order to be successful (Carr). Basically, a female MC can be socially conscious like Queen Latifah, sexually explicit like Lil’ Kim, or feminist like MC Lyte. It’s rare to find a female rap artist who does not fit into one of these molds – either because her success depended on conforming, or because fans won’t label her any other way.

As the genre has progressed into what it is today, sub-genres have cropped up in the work of both male and female artists that are important because of their elements of political activism. The first stream is Gangsta Rap, whose lyrics typically center on suspicion of women (when the

artist is male), loyalty to crew, confrontation of the world with a stone face, and hatred of authority. It is aggressively violent and intends to portray the lifestyle of youths living in inner cities (Bynoe). This intention is what makes it important for our purposes – it tells of a bleak existence, but one that is factual. It therefore becomes a form of political activism – intentional or not – because it makes outsiders aware of the rough conditions inner city youth live in (rampant violence) and the way it negatively alters their worldview (hatred of authority, suspicion of women, and stone-faced disposition). The second sub-genre of importance is Conscious Rap. This is a sub-genre whose basis lies in the themes of social justice and community upliftment. It discusses the detrimental effects of materialism, criminality, drugs, and politics within the context of Black empowerment (Bynoe). This sub-genre is overtly political, often detailing marginalization of Blacks and calling for action from policy makers, Blacks themselves, and society in general. It also reflects African Americans' experience back at them, which affirms that their experience is common and can move them to act on behalf of their community.

Regardless of whether hip-hop music is classified as Gangsta Rap, Conscious Rap, or neither, it can influence identity in significant ways at the individual and collective level. Hip-hop as a genre has a reputation for being exceptionally personal and unguarded, which allows for listeners to more deeply identify with it than with other types of music. This has contributed to its role as a lifestyle instead of simply a type of music. It “offers a set of dress, speech and social behavior patterns of which to emulate. As adolescents choose which parts of music culture they want to emulate, they form individual identities” (Jenkins). Hip-hop music, then, directly constructs individual identity. It does the same on the cultural level, as such choices become collective. “The themes many young people identify with in [hip-hop] lyrics have currently

become part of Black Identity” (Elvers). In other words, African Americans pick out the lyrics and themes that are truest to themselves. These themes affirm that other people are facing the same experiences. These shared experiences then become a part of Black identity.

In order for this to be true, there must exist hip-hop music that has been powerful enough to contribute to individual identity and music that has had a large enough following to contribute to a collective identity. Indicators of such power might include name recognition, exceptional album sales, and acclaim from within the industry as indexed by awards won, overwhelmingly positive reviews, and praise from other artists. Two artists check all of these boxes and more: Kanye West and Lauryn Hill. Both are household names that are highly regarded by artists and non-artists alike. Both have received exceptional reviews and album sales. And both are undoubtedly influential in identity construction among African Americans.

Kanye West: The Jerk and the Genius

Conceited but humble, conscious but misogynistic, religious but materialistic, and confrontational but apologetic, Kanye West is a walking contradiction. This does little to decrease his credibility and much to add to his intrigue, as he has been widely – and positively – reviewed. Aside from winning 21 Grammys (Azeemk), all seven of his albums have gone platinum (Calrin) and he has totaled three double-platinum singles, one quadruple-platinum single, and one quintuple platinum single (Suarez). In December of 2005, West and his sophomore album *Late Registration* were nominated for 10 Grammy awards – the most for any artist that year (Trickey). *Rolling Stone's* Rob Sheffield gave the same album five stars, calling it "an undeniable triumph, packed front to back, so expansive it makes the debut sound like a rough

draft" (Trickey). His musical merit has earned him status as the 68th most followed person on social media (Berg) and *Time* magazine's distinction of "the smartest man in pop music" (Collins). Not only is his work valued by critics, but also by other musicians –he produced songs for more than 40 artists before his own rap career began, including Alicia Keys and John Legend (Trickey), and when he lost best new artist award to Maroon 5 at the 2004 Grammys, the band praised West from the podium (Manheim).

What West lacks in negative criticism for his music he gains for his no-holds-barred character, which has spurred many incidents of controversy. He made enemies during the infamous Taylor Swift incident, when he interrupted her acceptance speech for Best Female Video to defend Beyoncé's candidacy (Serpick). Despite apologizing and moving out of the country following the incident, he repeated the same mistake when he criticized Beck at the 2015 Grammys (a man who plays 14 instruments) for "not respecting artistry" and claimed that Beck should have given his award for Album of the Year to Beyoncé (Marcus). He has even stepped on toes within his own genre when he announced in 2007 that his third album, *Graduation*, would be released on the same date as 50 Cent's *Curtis*, spurring a rivalry. West has also distinguished himself outside the music industry as the only rap artist to garner the distaste of two U.S. presidents. The first occurred during a Hurricane Katrina relief telethon on NBC when West went off script to say, "I hate the way they portray us in the media. You see a black family, it says they're looting. If you see a white family, it says they're looking for food... George Bush doesn't care about black people." His statement was followed by an outcry that prompted NBC to issue an apology (Serpick). More recently, when West announced his plans to run for president in 2020, Obama gave him cheeky "advice" that alluded to West's marriage to Kim Kardashian and the raciness of his music (Mason).

Although some disagree with his eagerness to share unpopular opinions, many argue that his achievements warrant him the credibility to do so. This is especially true considering the path he carved for himself in a hip-hop world that had previously seen no other artist with a background like his. When West decided he wanted to transition from producing to rapping, prospective record companies like Roc-A-Fella were uncertain. West was the child of two academics, attended college, wore preppy clothes, and never sold drugs as an adolescent (Collins). "We all grew up street guys who had to do whatever we had to do to get by," Jay-Z told *Time*. "Then there's Kanye, who to my knowledge has never hustled a day in his life. I didn't see how it could work" (Trickey). Once West was signed, his music was an echo of his persona: distinctly different from the status quo. His first album, *The College Dropout*, "rewrote the rules of hip-hop, reviving socially conscious lyrics and mixing them with cutting-edge commercial party beats" (Trickey). The album was so groundbreaking that actor/singer Jamie Foxx and Darryl McDaniels of the rap group Run-D.M.C., asserted that it had restored their faith in hip-hop (Trickey). The track "Jesus Walks" stood out in particular because, although religiously oriented hip-hop had been "attempted almost since the genre's beginnings, its serious marching-band rhythms and rhythmically complex gospel vocal-group backing sounded completely new" (Manheim).

Walking contradiction, object of critical acclaim, impetus of controversy, and rap industry game changer, Kanye West is truly unlike any rap artist our world has seen. His passion, intelligence, and original point of view make for a body of music worthy of more extensive analysis than what is currently contained in the scholarship.

Lauryn Hill: Most Missed Mystery

We have seen that female hip-hop artists have historically been limited in the roles they have been allowed to occupy, as well as in the credit they have been given for their accomplishments. However, there are a few female rappers that have managed to break this mold – that have shaken the word “female” as a qualifier from their reviews. As a former superstar and current recluse, Hill is at once the most enigmatic and iconic figures hip-hop has seen since its birth.

Lauryn Hill was raised in New Jersey by a computer analyst and a teacher who supported her aspirations to work in the entertainment industry from a young age. She began her musical career at the age of 13 when she joined the rap trio the Fugees (“About Lauryn Hill”), and later went on to enjoy a hugely successful solo career. Hill’s talent is evident in the numbers associated with both gigs: the Fugee’s sophomore album “The Score,” co-written and produced by Hill, sold 18 million copies, won two Grammy Awards, and made the trio the best-selling rap act in history (Brennan). But her real accomplishment came two years later with the 1998 release of her solo album “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,” which sold more than 420,000 copies during its first week (a record by any female artist) and 3 million copies in less than 6 months (Brennan), catapulting her into the spotlight. The album’s success didn’t end with sales – Hill was nominated for 10 Grammy awards and won five, including Album of the Year, Best New Artist, Best Female R&B Vocal Performance, Best R&B Song, and Best R&B Album -- the most ever for a woman (“Lauryn Hill”). Furthermore, she was named “Artist of the Year” by Spin Magazine (“About Lauryn Hill”), and became the only female artist to win the Grammy Award for Album of the Year in two consecutive years (“Lauryn Hill”). When all was said and done, she had grossed \$40 million from royalties, advances, touring, merchandising, and other

revenues, and had pocketed about \$25 million of that (Blau). The album, in short, established Hill “as one of the great female MCs, a quadruple threat: a rapper as well as a world-class singer, songwriter and producer” (Lang).

What exactly was it about her music that made it such a hit? She produced albums that shifted the entire genre of hip-hop. *The Score*, which was produced by Lauryn and her two fellow Fugees, was “widely hailed as a turning point for contemporary African-American music” (Brennan). In her solo album, she was “one of the first female rappers to appeal beyond hip-hop’s initial audience as she incorporated elements of soul, R&B, and reggae into her music,” which “shepherded in mainstream acceptance with a mainstream market beyond traditional rap circles” (Blau). *Spin* magazine wrote about *Miseducation*, saying, “In a fractured musical landscape, it simultaneously united the Sound-Scan masses—from hip-hop heads to frat rats to Lilith Fair maidens” (Brennan). NPR also commented on the album’s far reach: “In 1998, everyone was listening to her sing: mothers, daughters, college students and little kids. *Miseducation* crossed demographics and genres” (Chace).

With great success comes great controversy, it seems. Hill stirred up rumors when she left the Fugees to create her own album, with fans pointing fingers at her affair with a Fugee and song lyrics from both sides to back it up (Brennan). She also caused a stir in a 2003 Christmas concert at the Vatican, where she protested the Catholic Church’s treatment of sexual abuse by members of the clergy (“Lauryn Hill”). More consequentially, after her Grammy nominations were announced, four musicians claimed that they were denied sufficient credit for their contributions to *Miseducation*. They sued Hill for a reported \$5 million (“About Lauryn Hill”).

Despite it all, she is praised far and wide. Out of the 525 covers *Time* magazine had published throughout the 1990s, only 17 were featured black figures. Out of those 17, only five –

including Bill Cosby, Bill Jones, Toni Morrison, and Oprah Winfrey – worked in entertainment. Lauryn Hill was the only musician, and she was only 23 years old (Blau). Time magazine isn't the only one who thinks she's this legendary – other highly successful artists do too. “Lauryn had that blend of toughness and soulfulness, melody and swagger,” said John Legend. “She did it better than anybody still has done it. People are still trying to capture that moment.” (7). Nicki Minaj has called Hill her “hero,” claiming that quoted her in her high school yearbook, and described meeting her as “an outer body experience” (Lang). Miseducation became so esteemed that even religious congregations used her songs in their services, substituting God in the lyrics. D'Angelo, one of Hill's collaborators, told Rolling Stone in 2008, “Whenever they make a gospel version from a secular song, that's significant” (Blau).

Despite the two decades that have passed since Miseducation was released, despite the lack of a sophomore album, and despite the lawsuit that tainted production credits, “No one ever stops missing her,” says Jay Smooth, a longtime radio DJ. “Every time you say her name — like, 'Lauryn Hill walked into Home Depot' — you'll be hoping she starts tapping on a table and making a beat and singing” (Chace).

Methodology

In the present study, I will analyze both Kanye West's and Lauryn Hill's debut albums to draw conclusions about the ways in which these albums create an identity for the artists themselves as well as for their community of listeners. “Creating an identity” for both the individual and the collective will be operationalized using the concept of ego-function that was

presented in 1971 by Richard Gregg. The theory of Ego-function has been commonly used since its inception to address the rhetoric of identity and protest.

We begin our discussion of Richard Gregg's concept of ego-function by first establishing its precursor: Don Burks' concept of self-persuasion. Burks first establishes the concept of self-persuasion by drawing on Maurice Natanson's concept of dialectic rhetoric, which includes dialogue with oneself. "The thesis I wish to propose is that just as there is an internal or self-dialectic so there is self-persuasion," he says. Burks builds on this to say that we persuade ourselves in the same way that we may persuade others: "As internal dialectic is analogous to dialectic with others, so self-persuasion is analogous to persuasion of others." If Natanson can argue that we can engage in dialectic rhetoric with ourselves, he says, we can also engage in persuasion with ourselves. Furthermore, "There is I suggest no intrinsic difference in the persuasion of another and the persuasion of self." This can be applied to creation of identity because, in the exact same way that we use messages to persuade other people about who we are, we use messages to persuade ourselves about who we are. This self-persuasion often happens in music, where lyrics serve to both form and reinforce our ideas of our sense of self.

These arguments are used as a basis for Gregg's concept of ego-function. Most protest rhetoric, Gregg says, is not actually intended as a message to its presupposed audience to enact change. It is used in reality to persuade the speakers *themselves* of their identity. This happens through three stages, all of which, I will argue, are equally relevant to hip-hop music. The first stage claims that the protestor's ego is in some way oppressed. The second demonizes the oppressor and frames them as an enemy. The third affirms the protestor's ego or even frames it as superior to the enemy's. He also claims that although this process is primarily intended to establish one's own identity, a person going through this process may also be collaterally

establishing an identity for those who have similar “ego-concerns.” In other words, it is this clause that allows us to draw conclusions about how West and Hill create a collective identity for their listeners.

This theory has been used to analyze protest rhetoric from a variety of issues, all of which follow the three-stage sequence laid out by Gregg. As a reminder, the first stage is the creation of identity through the claim of victimage. Bohn David Lattin applied this stage by analyzing the rhetoric used first to separate the oppressed group from the oppressor. “Ego-function speakers employ rhetorical tactics (ad hominem, ridicule, hyperbole), to enlarge the ideological gulf between themselves and those in the larger, more heterogeneous culture” (10). Once this separation is established, they describe their group’s oppression. For example, in the rhetoric surrounding National Same Sex Kiss Day, a protest against Chi-fil-A’s anti-gay stance, protestors accused the company of “actively funding the blocking/removal of his rights as a human being” (Weber 33). Another protestor explained the reason for this protest was “not to allow our hard earned dollars to go to an organization that donates OUR money to hate organizations that promote anti-gay measures within our communities” (Weber 38). These protestors paint themselves as victims whose “hard-earned dollars” are being used by causes that directly attack them. In an analysis of “other-directed social movements,” or causes in which someone fights on behalf of another, Charles Stewart found that the rhetoric of the protests depicted dramatizations of the brutality of abortion, apartheid, and treatment of animals, for example (Stewart 100). In this study, I will examine how West and Hill distance themselves and those who identify with them (people of any race, but depending on the artist is often presumably African American) from their enemy (anyone who oppresses them), and how they go on to frame

themselves and those who identify with them as victims. In doing so, I will analyze the themes, mental images, musical motifs, and rhetorical techniques used.

The second stage is the establishment and demonization of the enemy. Gregg's theory states, "The struggle for a resurrected self seems to be aided by locating other selves, establishing personality typologies among them, and using these as targets for arrows of scorn, ridicule, condemnation, and charges of character defect." Basically, the oppressed speaker demeans his or her oppressor in order to restore identity. This stage is described in the relevant literature. In a study analyzing the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam, the rhetoric of racial separation is called one of the organization's "key discursive strategy[ies]" which it uses to "depict whites as inherently racist" (McPhail 421). In the Nation's creation mythology, whites are depicted "as subhuman, even animalistic, in the bowels of savage Europe" (McPhail 420). Rush Limbaugh used equally harsh language to demonize his opponents, calling them "eco-terrorists," "animal rights enviro-wackows," and "feminazis" (Lattin 6). Defenders of the second amendment accomplish the same task using politically extreme language. They call their opponents "gun grabbers" or the "power structure," characterizing them as "fascists," "repressive," and "violent" (Lunceford 335). The rhetoric analyzed in these studies all denounces their enemy in order to create a moral high-ground for the in-group. In the present study, I will be examining the ways in which West and Hill create and demonize their enemy. I will also discuss how this accomplishes the creation and demonization of a collective enemy. In doing so, I will analyze the themes, mental images, musical motifs, and rhetorical techniques used.

The establishment and demonization of the enemy gives way to the third and final stage of ego-function: reaffirmation of ego. "As the result of attacking enemies," says Gregg, "Protestors appear to experience and express feelings of ego-enhancement, ego-affirmation, and

even ego-superiority.” In this stage, the speaker essentially reassures themselves of their own ego, or even establishes the self as better than it was before it went through the process of victimage and demonizing the enemy. Gregg explains why this stage is a natural progression from the demonization: “By painting the enemy in dark hued imagery of vice, corruption, evil, and weakness, one may more easily convince himself of his own superior virtue and thereby gain a symbolic victory of ego-enhancement” (339). How exactly can this ego-enhancement be accomplished? In his analysis of Rush Limbaugh’s rhetoric, Lattin found the use of “ornate style to praise his community’s ideology” (6). He continues:

Limbaugh used a paranoid style of discourse in order to affirm his followers ego and their vision of reality. For example, when Limbaugh talks about the issue of abortion and refers to pro-choice women as "feminazis" the auditor confronts a plexus of attitudes about abortion and the women who support it. Feminists become Nazis, a metaphor packed with negative connotations. Limbaugh and his listeners are not opposing women, but Nazis. Their cause is symbolically enhanced and ego-affirmed because they face a great evil. The greater the villain the worthier the conservative audience member feels (Lattin 7).

Sometimes “ornate style” is unnecessary, and a protestor must simply restate their side’s “goodness,” Weber says. For example, a Chick-fil-a representative defended her side of the debate with the gay community by saying “It is so important to support businesses that still reflect good Christian values and refuse to cave into to the social pressure of the vocal minority.” This highlighted the group’s own importance and reaffirmed their ego. Stewart found a similar strategy in other-directed social movements, which simply reaffirmed themselves as “concerned humanitarians and caring people with genuine compassion” (Stewart 98). Another tactic used to ego-enhance found in Stewart’s study is simple bragging. The movements he considered often used stories of victories and successes in their campaigns (Stewart 100). Chick-fil-a protestors also reflected on their successes, which “reaffirmed their own personal identity and invited other like-minded people to share in larger collective identity as advocates of equal rights” (Weber

43). When those invitations were successful and the community grew, the cycle began again. In the present study I will discuss how the two artists reaffirm their own egos, as well as reaffirm the ego of those who identify with them. In doing so, I will analyze the themes, mental images, musical motifs, and rhetorical techniques used.

Chapter Preview

In Chapter 2, I apply the existing literature on Ego-Function to answer the question: how does Kanye West create an identity for himself and for those who identify with him in his debut album, *The College Dropout*? In his discussion of the black experience, what images, anecdotes, themes, and musical motifs does West use to construct Ego-Function? In other words, how does he establish oppression of ego, create an enemy, and affirm the ego?

In Chapter 3, I again apply the existing literature on Ego-Function to answer the question: how does Lauryn Hill create an identity for herself and for those who identify with her in her debut album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*? In her discussion of the black experience, what images, anecdotes, attitudes, and musical motifs does Hill use to construct Ego-Function? In other words, how does he establish oppression of ego, create an enemy, and affirm the ego?

In Chapter 4, I conclude my analysis and discuss the consequences of the use of ego-function in hip-hop music. In doing so, I answer the following questions: (1) How does the language of ego-function differ between the artists? (2) How does their music speak to listeners of different ethnicities? (3) What role does gender play in ego-function? Does the language of ego-function differ between genders?

Chapter 2

Ego-function and Kanye West's *The College Dropout*

Unlike many artists whose debut albums go unnoticed until widespread fame comes later, Kanye West's *The College Dropout*, released in 2004, was highly anticipated and exceptionally successful. The album sold nearly half a million copies within a week, one million within a month, and another million within four months (Balfour). Pretty good for a first-time artist in a still-emerging genre. Today, the record boasts 3.3 million sales (Cantor), making it West's best selling album (Balfour) out of seven.

The College Dropout found success right out of the gate: the album debuted at #2 on the Billboard 200 (Balfour). It did even better on the charts at the track level. "Slow Jamz," which featured Jamie Foxx and Twista, scored all three artists their first #1 hit (Balfour), and both "All Falls Down" and "Jesus Walks" received radio play throughout the rest of 2004 (they were released in February) (Cantor). All in all, the album produced a total of three singles that reigned in the Top 15 (Balfour), proving it was an exceptionally special album to mainstream listeners and rap fans alike.

The album's chart success was reflected at the 2005 Grammy Awards, where it won Best Rap Album, Best Rap Song for "Jesus Walks," and Best Rap/Sung Collaboration for "Slow Jamz" (Cantor). *Dropout* received the most nominations of the year: ten, compared to Jay-Z's nine (Balfour), signifying a huge endorsement by the music industry's elite.

Music critics wrote reviews whose praise surpassed even that of the Grammys. Ten years after its release, VIBE called it "the best album he's ever put out" and deserving of a perfect five

star rating (Aguilar & Kenner). Pitchfork thought it was so strong that it contained “enough singles in reserve to fill out the calendar year” (Aguilar & Kenner). Its strength came as a surprise to some, as West was previously known exclusively as a music producer. “With the release of his debut album,” said VIBE, “West not only reaffirms his status as one of today's elite beat crafters, but the Chicago native lets heads know he was rocking mikes long before he started messin' around with soundboards” (Aguilar & Kenner). VIBE was not the only one impressed with his switch to an unfamiliar medium. Dan Frosch, former editor at The Source adds that he and his friends were “not only impressed with the beats but also lyrically – it was just a huge breath of fresh air in terms of its wittiness and intensity.”

When all was said and done, West had created “ a paradigm-shifting solo LP which would come to influence almost every bit of hip-hop that came after it” (Cantor). Why? The introspective and perceptive lyrics seemed to be what made the album so game-changing to listeners. Audiences found the tracks to be “both personal and strangely universal” (A.V. Club), and capable of finding “philosophy in mundane things” (Village Voice). It was an album that understood people:

“The College Dropout “was the voice of a dreamer. The voice of someone who nobody took seriously. 'Ye sounded like everyone else in the disenfranchised middle class, people who had to be rich just to be poor. Someone who understood them, and had a way out. "The College Dropout" was *it* (Cantor).

There was something about West’s lyrics that connected people, that a wide range of listeners could profoundly relate to in a way they had never related to rap music before. By writing about and confirming his own identity, Kanye formed and confirmed the collective identity of his listeners. HipH8opDX spoke for many when he wrote, “Damn Kanye, I’m glad you dropped out of college” (Balfour).

We have seen that *The College Dropout* was hugely successful in part because its lyrics had an ability to connect people as well as to connect *to* people. In doing so, he develops his concept of black male identity quite comprehensively using both ego-function and other methods. In this analysis, I will review how West works through each of the three stages of ego-function (victimization of the ego, establishment and demonization of enemy, and reaffirmation of ego) to rhetorically create black male identity for himself and, collaterally, his listeners. I will also discuss the ways in which he contributes to collective identity *without* using ego-function.

Victimization of Ego

The first stage of Gregg's ego-function theory, victimization of ego, occurs when the speaker declares "that one's ego is somehow ignored, or damaged, or disenfranchised," as Greggs explains. It is important to remember that in this stage, the speaker exclusively talks about the self. The presence of an enemy is implied (there is a reason the speaker is oppressed) but not directly acknowledged quite yet.

West most frequently achieves victimization through collective language. About half of the time he either uses "we" or "you" to make it clear that he's talking directly to anyone else who can relate to the same adversity (presumably other African Americans). The other half of the time, when these terms are absent from his lyrics or when he is speaking about a personal experience using "I" or "me," he is still contributing to the victimization stage for listeners. As Gregg's theory states, "At the same time an individual is engaged in a rhetorical act for the primary purpose of establishing his own identity to himself, he may also, acting as surrogate, aid

in the establishment of identities for others. Sometimes interacting affirmations accomplish the ego-identification of a number of selves.” In other words, even when the speaker is not intending to craft his message with a collective identity in mind, he may still produce collective identity. This happens when “a number of selves,” or the collective, identify with the speaker’s ego.

This analysis operates under the assumption that West’s lyrics craft a persona of his audience as African American. This can be gleaned from a combination of certain techniques that recur throughout the album. First, West equates lyrics about black people with “us” or “we.” Examples of such a lyric are, “We don’t care what people say, my ni—as” and “Now ni—as can’t make it to ballots to choose leadership/But we can make it to Jacob’s and to the dealership.” He uses the words “ni—as” and “we” interchangeably, signifying that he envisions his listeners as African American. Second, West equates his opposition with white people, making it clear that African Americans are the in-group and white Americans are the out-group. Example of such a lyric are “Drug dealer buy Jordan, crackhead buy crack/And the white man get paid off of all of that” and “I get down for my grandfather who took my mama/Made her sit in that seat where white folks ain’t want us to eat.” He frames white people as enemies – they are very clearly not included in his definition of “we.” These converse techniques work together to send the message that West’s idea of his audience’s persona is African American.

Keeping this interplay of individual identity and collective identity in mind, we move forward with our analysis of victimization of the ego in *The College Dropout*. The victimization process, as a reminder, is essentially characterized by declarations of oppression. West makes this proclamation primarily using anecdotes and mental images of African Americans interacting with “the establishment,” or whoever falls into the category of the dominant, oppressive society. He uses this technique about eight times, almost exclusively in the nine more “socially

conscious” songs on the album (as opposed to the five entertainment-centric songs). West signifies “the establishment” using institutions like schools, police, court rooms, the electoral system, and employers. In this album, three themes arise from African American interaction with the aforementioned institutions: instilled inferiority, unjust law enforcement, and being exploited.

The first and perhaps most elementary theme is the black experience of being told their race is inferior, which is addressed in about seven songs out of 17. In “We Don’t Care,” West tells the story of how his grade school administrators placed a disproportionate amount of black students in the special needs program. “Now tell my momma I belong in that slow class/Sad enough we on welfare/They tryna put me on the school bus with the space for the wheelchair.” In this anecdote West is degraded by being put in the “slow class” and on “the school bus with space for a wheelchair,” an unjust experience made worse by the fact that presumably far fewer white students go through it. He mentions welfare here as another institution that reinforces white America’s-proclaimed idea of black inferiority by implying that it is mostly African Americans that are on welfare. Basically, it’s bad enough that African Americans are on welfare, but they are being further pushed down by administrators who think his skin color is enough to justify placement in a special needs program. He extends on the theme of instilled inferiority in “All Falls Down” with the following, straightforward line: “Cause they made us hate ourself and love they wealth.” According to Kanye, white Americans have treated blacks as inferior to such an extent that they have made blacks hate themselves. Not only do they hate themselves, they yearn to be something that whites are: wealthy. (Although the idea of white people being wealthier than blacks is a stereotype, it is one that West works into his lyrics as fact.) Their feeling of inferiority has gone so far as to want to become someone else entirely. He develops

this narrative by saying that when you do achieve this white-synonymous quality of wealth, you *still* are not seen as equal. “Even if you in a Benz, you still a ni--a in a coupe,” he writes. Even if you have as much material success as a white American, many still see you as inferior.

According to West, inferiority has been instilled in himself and (directly stated or indirectly implied) anyone who looks like him by “the establishment”. His description of this experience builds his status as a victim.

The second prominent theme through which victimage arises is interaction with law enforcement, which is addressed in four different songs. West extends the media’s narrative of African Americans’ unjust amount of interaction with police and the court system. He paints the violent picture of an encounter with the police in “Two Words”: “And I basically know now/We get racially profiled/’Cuffed up and hosed down, pimped up and ho’d down.” The way he states this in the present tense makes this encounter seem habitual, which further enforces the frequency with which this type of violent and prejudiced encounter happens. This demonstrates that the way police treat African Americans is proof of their victimhood. West then describes what happens when these types of encounters give way to time in court. “We ain’t goin’ no where but got suits and cases,” he writes in “Jesus Walks”. This line alludes to the fact that African Americans experience a disproportionate amount of civil *lawsuits* and criminal *cases*. “Cases” could even refer to cold cases, referring to police violence against blacks. According to West, whether blacks are being sued, forced to defend themselves in court, or being killed, the law enforcement system unfairly targets them. Therefore, they are victims.

The third and final theme utilized by West to prove that African Americans are victims is the narrative of being exploited by whites, which is addressed primarily in two tracks:

“Spaceship” and “Never Let Me Down.” This narrative is particularly poignant after he

establishes the themes of instilled inferiority and unjust treatment by the law enforcement system. Basically, he says, African Americans are abused by whites but used for their gain when it is convenient for them. He establishes this theme first in “Spaceship” with a familiar anecdote: a teenager’s first job. His first job experience is much different, though, than the majority of Americans’. He describes how his boss wouldn’t trust him not to steal, but then turned around and used his appearance to demonstrate the store’s endorsement of diversity in order to make a sale. “They take me to the back and pat me/Askin’ me about some khakis/But let some black people walk in/I bet you they show off their token blackie/Oh now they love Kanye, let’s put him all in the front of the store.” Essentially, the only time his boss valued him was when he could be used to make a sale to other African Americans. He extends on the theme of being abused and then used when it is convenient for someone else’s gain in a more universal lyric in “Never Let Me Down.” He writes, “Now ni—as can’t make it to ballots to choose leadership/But we can make it to Jacob’s and to the dealership.” African American votes are not valued by society, he says, but their money is. According to West, African Americans are mistreated by white Americans at all times, except when they can be used for some type of gain – economic or otherwise. His description of this treatment is used to establish the fact that African Americans are victims.

Overall, the rhetoric that Kanye West uses in *The College Dropout* to establish African Americans as victims very closely aligns with what is expected by the first stage of Gregg’s theory. These lyrics do indeed proclaim that the ego is “ignored, or damaged, or disenfranchised.” West writes about this disenfranchisement from a male standpoint, but does not exclude females in any of his lyrics. Therefore, we can conclude by default that West’s world contains both disenfranchised men and women. In discussing this disenfranchisement, he

accomplishes the task set forth by the victimage stage as described by Gregg: the lyrics “place those who share the perceptions in symbolically defensive positions from which they must extricate themselves before they can realize more positive identities.” He has placed himself in a defensive position. Now, in order to extricate himself from the situations in which his ego is damaged, West must first establish and demonize his enemy.

Establishment and Demonization of Enemy

As we have seen, once the speaker establishes himself as a victim, the next stage in Gregg’s theory is to establish and demonize an enemy. This stage, Gregg says, occurs when one “locates what one perceives as the persons, behaviors, actions, or conditions which cause or contribute to feelings of inadequacy, then to take a positive stand against them.” In this stage, the speaker doesn’t yet condemn his enemy. He simply states who he is and speaks in a confrontational or hostile way against him.

In order to achieve this stage, Kanye returns to the institutions of law enforcement and employers, which is addressed in four different songs. He is straightforward in his establishment of law enforcement as an enemy in “All Falls Down”: “I say ‘Fuck the police,’ that’s how I treat ‘em.” Here he is locating the persons that contribute to the previously developed feeling of inadequacy (inferiority), and taking a stand against them. He doesn’t yet criticize the police here, just as he doesn’t in his lyrics regarding his employer in “Spaceship”: “If my manager insults me again/I will be assaulting him/After I fuck the manager up/Then I’m gonna shorten the register up.” This line very clearly states that West’s manager is an enemy because, we can infer, the way

he “insults” West creates a feeling of inferiority. He then goes on to take a stand against him by threatening that he will assault him and steal from the store. Neither of these examples explicitly codes the enemy (law enforcement and the manager) as white, but it is implied in succeeding lyrics and within the context of the songs. In addition to stating who the enemy is and speaking in a violent way about him, establishment of the enemy can also contain an explanation of why the enemy *is* an enemy. West says the United States as a whole is an enemy in “Two Words” by saying, “Two words, United States, no love, no breaks.” Here he doesn’t just point a finger, he explains why it’s pointed in that direction. The United States provides no love and no breaks for himself and those who look like him. He does the same in his discussion of his family history. He writes in “Never Let Me Down,” “I get down for my grandfather who took my mama/Made her sit in that seat where white folks ain't want us to eat/At the tender age of 6 she was arrested for the sit-ins.” He establishes “white folks” as an enemy and explains that he considers them so because they didn’t want his family to eat in white-only restaurants and they arrested his mom. However, there is a lack of condemnation or criticism of “white folks” character.

When there *is* condemnation or criticism of the enemy’s character, we have demonization of the enemy. Gregg describes this stage as the process of “locating other selves, establishing personality typologies among them, and using these as targets for arrows of scorn, ridicule, condemnation, and charges of character defect.” In other words, this stage is all about ridiculing and demonizing the character of the previously established enemy. The first method West uses to ridicule the character of his enemy is by framing himself and those who relate to him as innocent victims and framing their adversaries as wicked victimizers. In order to do so, he uses the motif of police violence. West writes in “Jesus Walks,” “Getting choked by detectives, yeah yeah, now check the method/They be askin’ us questions, harass and arrest us/Sayin’ ‘we eat pieces of shit

like you for breakfast.”” Once again he paints a brutal picture: the police choke, harass, and arrest African Americans, and demean their worth by saying “we eat pieces of shit like you for breakfast.” This lyric frames the enemy as a wicked victimizer of African Americans (the innocent victim), which demonizes their character. West also frames the enemy as a wicked victimizer and himself as an innocent victim in less violent ways. “They tryna cut our lights out like we don’t live here/Look what they handed us, fathers abandoned us,” he says in “We Don’t Care.” The enemy is depriving them of basic needs (lights), which signifies a wicked victimizer. Kanye and his listeners are innocent victims – their father’s abandoned us, and they were handed an incredibly difficult life.

The second method West uses to demonize the character of his enemy is by demonstrating that the enemy treats blacks as unimportant and worthless while maintaining their attitude as important and valuable. In his discussion of the economic system as an enemy in “All Falls Down,” he says, “Drug dealer buy Jordan, crack head buy crack/And the white man get paid off of all of that.” The drug-user buys crack from his drug dealer, who then uses the money to buy Jordans. In the end, the money ends up in the pockets of the important and valuable white CEO. In this situation, the (presumably black) “drug dealer” and “crack head” are in dangerous life situations, but the powerful white CEO doesn’t care that these are the sources of his money because black people are unimportant and worthless. West continues to prove this point using an everyday example of racism. “Racism's still alive, they just be concealin' it/But I know they don't want me in the damn club/They even made me show ID to get inside of Sam's Club,” he writes in “Never Let Me Down.” Although this line is a joke because everyone has to show ID to get inside of Sam’s Club, his point is still valuable. To white people, he is unimportant enough to have to prove himself everywhere he goes. Using the innocent victim versus wicked victimizer

frame as well as the important and valuable versus unimportant and worthless frame, West successfully demonizes his enemy.

After establishing himself as a victim, West then established and demonized his enemy. This stage serves an important purpose according to Gregg. He says, "Symbolic reconstruction of situation, which recasts the exigencies and individuals, with whom one cannot or does not want to cope, into images of "enemyness," allows one to reject them, flaunt them, strike out against them, and so gain some initiative of action." He is saying here that rejecting the situation and striking out against it allows them to take action in order to reconcile the emotionally uncomfortable situation that the speaker is protesting. In this context, to reconcile is to reaffirm the ego, which is the third stage of Gregg's ego-function theory.

Reaffirmation of Ego

The third stage of Gregg's theory occurs when the speaker reaffirms the ego or even posits it as superior to what it was before the three-stage process began. Ego-affirmation/enhancement is very closely linked to identification and demonization of the enemy. "As a result of attacking enemies, protestors appear to experience and express feelings of ego-enhancement, ego-affirmation, and even ego-superiority," Gregg says. The two develop sequentially, and reaffirmation of ego can occur if and only if demonization of the enemy is accomplished first. Gregg explains why this is so: "By painting the enemy in a dark hued imagery of vice, corruption, evil, and weakness, one may more easily convince himself of his own superior virtue and thereby gain a symbolic victory of ego-enhancement." West achieves

ego-affirmation and ego-superiority using the themes of institutions' treatment of African Americans, white stereotypes of African Americans, and overcoming the limits society sets on African Americans.

First we will analyze West's use of ego-affirmation. This happens when, in denouncing his enemy or rejecting its point of view, he reassures himself of his worth. In doing so, we first return to the anecdote West tells about school administrators placing black students in the special education program. In "We Don't Care" he writes, "We ain't retards, the way teachers thought." He is rejecting the school's point of view and reaffirming himself of the fact that he and his peers did not belong in the special education program. He does the same in a different setting: the streets. "To the hustlers, killers, murderers, drug dealers, even the scrippers/Jesus walks for them," he says in "Jesus Walks." All of these types of people – "hustlers," "killers," "murderers," "drug dealers," and "scrippers" – are markers of African American culture and music, which therefore alienates white Americans and frames them as an enemy. We have seen that West has demonized white Americans. As a result, what white Americans see as acceptable can be denounced and all of these people can be reassured of their worth, even though it counters what white culture accepts. Jesus still walks for them. West continues on to paint white American as evil, which allows him to reassure himself of his own worth. In "All Falls Down" he writes, "We shine because they hate us/floss 'cause they degrade us/we tryna buy back our forty acres." He is denouncing white Americans by pointing out their habits of hating and degrading black people. As a result, black people "shine" and "floss" – both good things. Listeners to this line can be reassured of their self worth. He repeats this pattern in a final, subtler, example. He talks about his journey from the situation in which his life began to the fame he is experiencing now. "I ain't played the hand I was dealt, I changed my cards/I prayed to

the skies and I changed my stars,” he says in “Last Call.” Here, the “hand I was dealt” functions as the enemy – it is what was given to him by white society. After demonizing white society, it he can reaffirm his ego by saying that he overcame the adversity he was born into and indeed changed his cards. In all of these examples, West reaffirms his own identity and collective black identity, which is made possible by the criticism of the enemy found in the prior stage.

West goes even further than ego-affirmation when he writes ego-superiority into his lyrics. This happens when, in attacking his enemy, he concludes that he is superior to the enemy in worth. He does so in “Two Words,” a song directed at white people, by saying, “Calm down, get back, ghetto people got this.” In other words, white people can step back because black people can handle this – what ever “this” is – more so than white people can. He does so again in a lyric from “We Don’t Care” referring to an actuarial prediction of 25 years for inner city males growing up in the ghetto: “We wasn’t s’posed to make it past 25/Joke’s on you, we still alive.” This lyric criticizes the enemy for underestimating blacks, which condemns the enemy’s character. The suggestion that the person who came up with this statistic (presumably a white person) is stupid suggests superiority of those who the statistic is about (a black person). In another subtle example, he says, “But we don't care what people say, my ni—as.” This lyric attacks white society by saying that black Americans don’t value their opinion. Its air of arrogance is what makes it ego-superiority, they are high enough above the enemy not to care what it says. In a final example from “School Spirit,” West discusses how he overcame the expectations set on him as a young black man and the plans other people had in mind for him due to what they perceived as his lack of capability. “Chasing y'all dreams and what you've got planned/Now I spit it so hot, you got tanned,” he says. In other words, the same people that underestimated him are now below him – he’s such a talented rapper that his success

metaphorically burns them. All in all, these examples serve as proof that rhetoric can engage in ego-superiority as a way to build identity.

This stage, reaffirmation of ego, could take place in *The College Dropout* only because the stage of enemy creation and demonization took place before it. The process occurred as Gregg describes it: “The rhetoric of attack becomes at the same time a rhetoric of ego-building, and the very act of assuming such a rhetorical stance becomes self-persuasive and confirmatory.” In this section we saw how the demonization of Kanye West’s enemy – white society – allowed for him to reaffirm ego or assert its superiority. Now that we have taken this album through all three stages of ego-function, we see how Kanye West uses this theory to create an identity for himself, as well as how he creates an identity for others – either by speaking directly for others, or by “acting as a surrogate” to aid in their establishment of identity, as Gregg says. While it is true that much of the ego-creation in this album *can* be explained by ego-function theory, there are multiple instances where Kanye creates identity in ways that cannot be classified by any of the three stages of the theory. We will study these instances next.

Limitations of Ego-function Theory

Kanye creates identity for himself and listeners in ways that do not prescribe to ego-function theory. In other words, they do not achieve victimization of ego, establishment and demonization of enemy, or reaffirmation of ego. He alternatively creates identity in two ways. The first is threading in the themes of religion and dreams of a better life. The second is by making personal statements that make him vulnerable.

Kanye West threads the themes of religion and dreams of a better life into his album to establish them as a part of African American culture. This then influences listeners to adopt or strengthen religion and dreams of a better life as parts of their identities. In these cases, the repeated use of these themes replaces ego-function in identity creation. He uses many attitudes to incorporate religion. The first is insecurity: “And I don't think there's nothin' I can do now to right my wrongs/(Jesus walk with me)/I wanna talk to God but I'm afraid cause we ain't spoke in so long.” This line from “Jesus Walks” promotes the idea to listeners that faith is the coping mechanism of choice for a personal crisis, and that it is important to keep up a relationship with God. He echoes this sentiment again in “Family Business” when he says “Keep your nose out the sky, keep your heart to God.” Again he is promoting the importance of maintaining a relationship with God. He gives religion a “cool” spin in “School Spirit” when he says, “Rosary piece, yeah that's my Catholic style.” By showing fans that he incorporates religion in his sense of style (which is something fans know he takes great pride in), he demonstrates its utmost importance. The attitude West adopts towards religion throughout the album – one of great respect and importance – allows listeners to be influenced to respect it and think of it as important as well. Kanye devotes just as much running time to the idea of dreaming of a better life. These dreams take the form of two themes: escapism and ambition. In his development of escapism, he frequently uses the motif of flying. “I've been workin' this graveshift and I ain't made shit/I wish I could buy me a spaceship and fly past the sky,” he says in “Spaceship.” He also includes “I’ll Fly Away,” a religious hymn from the early 1900s, which says “One glad morning/When this life is over/I'll fly away/To a land where/Joy shall never end/I'll fly away.” In both of these quotes, his current life situation is uncomfortable or dissatisfying. He dreams of flying “past the sky,” and “to a land where joy shall never end.” Inclusion of this theme puts the

idea in listeners' heads that they, too, can (and maybe should) dream of escaping the life they are currently living. To develop the idea of ambition, he draws on both his current situation and the one in which he wants to be. He describes his situation when he was a young man working at the mall in "Spaceship": "In the mall until 12 when my schedule had said 9/Putting them pants on shelves/Waiting patiently I ask myself/Where I want to go, where I want to be/Life is much more than running in the streets." Because he is dissatisfied with his life and knows there is "much more," he considers where he might want to take his life in the future. He provides an answer to this question in "School Spirit" when he says, "I'mma get on this TV, mama." He provides himself and those who identify with him with a goal. Overall, he alludes to this theme throughout the album to influence his listeners not to settle on the life they're currently living. By repeatedly utilizing these themes throughout the entire album, he instills the idea in listeners that they are an important part of black culture. By listening to this album, audiences might be influenced to decide that religion and dreams of a better life should be a part of their own identities. Therefore, he contributes to identity creation in a way that cannot be explained by ego-function theory.

As previously stated, West creates identity by making vulnerability-inducing personal statements that listeners can then, when using West as a role model, emulate in their own lives. In this way, vulnerability becomes a characteristic of collective identity. An example of such a statement comes in "All Falls Down": "Man, I promise, I'm so self-conscious/That's why you always see me with at least one of my watches/And I can't even go to the grocery store/Without some Ones that's clean and a shirt with a team." Kanye admits to using material items as a way of coping with his insecurity – if he's wearing nice clothes, he feels untouchable. A similarly "soft" and equally personal lyric from "Family Business" is: "You can still love your man and be manly." Showing affection for family members or friends does not make you any less manly,

he's saying. Out of fear of being labeled "soft", it was incredibly rare at this time for a male rapper to express any type of insecurity or to be openly affectionate in their music. By doing so, Kanye allows listeners to feel validated for feeling the same ways or doing the same things. He gives them permission to make insecurity and affection an acceptable part of black (male, if applicable) identity.

None of the methods used by Kanye to create identity that are described in this section are fulfillments of any of the stages of ego-function. They do not victimize the ego, create and demonize an enemy, or reaffirm the ego. They simply focus on personal experiences that don't involve an attack on the ego or the enemy. Instead, they promote certain themes or make statements that reject that status quo to influence listeners' identities. Therefore, we can conclude that, while ego-function theory does explain a lot of the identity creation in *The College Dropout*, there is more that cannot be explained by the theory.

Chapter 3

Ego-function and Lauryn Hill's *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*

If Lauryn Hill intended to make a splash as a solo artist with the *Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, it's safe to say she succeeded. The album sold 420,000 copies in its first week, breaking the record for first week sales for any female artist (Barnes) that was previously held by Madonna's *Ray of Light* with 371,000 copies sold (Reiss). Hill's closest competition at the time was the Beastie Boys' *Hello Nasty* with only 137,000 copies sold in its first week (Reiss), proving by comparison that *Miseducation* was special. The album went on to sell one million copies within its first month (Jacobs). The album's first single, "Doo Wop (That Thing)," was the force that

pushed the album to No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart (Jacobs) in its first week, and “Ex-factor” also peaked notably at No. 21. Soon it was receiving praise from high places: *The New York Times* called it “miraculous”, the *Village Voice* “majestic,” *Entertainment Weekly* “often-astonishingly powerful,” and Mary J. Blige “one of the most incredible albums ever made” (Jacobs).

The Grammy Awards agreed. Hill was the first woman to be nominated for 10 awards and win five (Barnes), including Album of the Year (over Madonna and Shania Twain), Best New Artist, Best R&B Song, Best Female R&B Vocal Performance, and Best R&B Album (Jacobs). Perhaps more importantly, this was the first hip-hop album to win Album of the Year (Barnes), which introduced the genre to a wider audience than ever before. The album proved its merit and longevity as it continued to collect honors into the decades after its release. In 2003, *Rolling Stone* ranked *Miseducation* at No. 312 on its list of 500 Greatest Albums of All Time (Jacobs). Even more impressive, the Library of Congress made *Miseducation* one of the 25 albums annually added to its archive in 2015. Requirements for this honor are that the recordings be “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant” and be at least 10 years old (Callahan). The Librarian of Congress, James H. Bilington, said of the inductees, “By preserving these recordings, we safeguard the words, sounds, and music that embody who we are as a people and a nation” (Rani). With this honor, Hill proved herself worthy not just to music lovers, but also to curators of highbrow American culture as a whole.

What exactly was it about this album that caused it to make so much history? Its most elementary virtue was its musical sophistication. It impressed both in its production and its vocals. “The album effortlessly fuses soul, rhythm and blues, rap and reggae,” *The Root* says. “Hill’s vocal range, smooth clear highs and vibrato are stunning. The rapping is rhythmically

compelling while always retaining, and frequently exploiting, the natural cadences of conversational speech” (Callahan). She accomplished all this on top of writing a wide range of content that compelled its listeners. *Miseducation* “is a work of honesty in which Hill explores her feelings on topics that included the deep wonder of pregnancy, the pitfalls of modern relationships and the experience of the sacred,” says *The Root* (Callahan). *AllMusic* said that her verses were “intelligent and hardcore” and her choruses “could move from tough to smooth in a flash” (Bush). The album was a musical embodiment of a balancing act: “The album is self-possessed without being self-obsessed, and while an enduring vibe is empowerment nothing is immodest. Hill’s songs are rooted in a specific genre but delivered with universal empathy.” (Bradly). According to *Pitchfork*, she had

to walk a series of intertwined tightropes specific to young black women. To be vulnerable, but fearless. To tell the truth, but look beautiful in doing so. To be driven by love, but ready to fight. To be soft enough to mother a newborn, but hard enough to protect her family. At 23 and pregnant, she was too young to be responsible for this much. It’s just that most people didn’t notice it, because on *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, she handled these competing drives so beautifully (Wallace).

With all its virtue, the album stood out among those of its kind. “I love that this isn’t a ‘sexy’ record, said *The Guardian*, “which was often the default setting for a female rapper, particularly in the 90s” (Nicholson). Indeed, it was a genre-changer.

The mid-’90s had seen the ascendancy of the genre to corporate-level sales numbers, aided in large part Bad Boy Entertainment, their bromidic disco samples and unrepentant tales of jewelry and gunplay, their rallying cry of “tits and bras, ménage à trois, sex in expensive cars.” Meanwhile, regional acts like N.W.A. and Geto Boys had introduced an incidental violence so extreme that it mutated into horrorcore, and even reigning king Nas, once known as the sharpest and most conscious of project prophets, had ridiculously rebranded himself “Esco” and was spinning elaborate drug tales in juvenile heist raps. The Fugees entered into this mayhem first to settle the score. But it was Lauryn Hill who came to re-educate the whole people (Wallace).

In comparison to *The College Dropout*, Hill's album takes on a less political air. While there are mentions of racial injustice, the focus lies in her identity as a woman, and the unique challenges that that brings. Her use of ego-function is developed mostly within the contexts of love, race, and being manipulated or taken advantage of as a woman. She also creates an identity for listeners without using ego-function by weaving in the themes of religion and distrust, as well as by declaring her stance on a number of topics that her audience can then adopt as their own. We will begin our analysis once again at the beginning of the ego-function cycle: victimization of the ego.

Victimization of Ego

When a speaker is pointing out the ways in which they have been oppressed, they are engaging in victimization of the ego. The first stage in ego-function theory, Gregg explains it as the "strong need to recognize and proclaim that one's ego is somehow ignored, or damaged, or disenfranchised." When a speaker engages in this stage, they are establishing their needs, which allow the speaker to discover and reinforce their identity and listeners to form their own identity by discovering which needs they identify with. In order to establish her needs and those of her listeners, Hill frames herself as a victim of love, her race, and manipulation.

First, much of *Miseducation* centers around the love story between Lauryn and a man who ended up marrying someone else. Her lyrics tell the story of how Lauryn loved him to an extreme, while he only reciprocated some of the time. It was this dynamic that allowed Lauryn to use love as a context for victimage. She sings about how much she sacrificed for him in "I Used to Love Him": "I chose a road of passion and pain/Sacrificed too much and waited in vain/Gave

up my power ceased being queen” and in “When It Hurts So Bad”: “See, I thought this feeling/It was all that I had/But how could this be love/And make me feel so bad? Gave up my power/I existed for you.” Essentially she sacrificed her entire identity (being queen) in order to exist for him. This is made worse by the fact that he did not do the same. In “Ex-Factor she asks, “Tell me, who I have to be/To get some reciprocity?” How much more does she have to do just to receive what a fraction of what she is giving? Later she demands, “Care for me, care for me!/I know you care for me!/There for me, there for me!/Said you'd be there for me!/Cry for me, cry for me!/You said you'd die for me!/Give to me, give to me!/Why won't you live for me?!” The desperate tone of these lyrics exacerbates her role as a victim here – this man made promises to love her the way she wanted to be loved and she isn’t seeing any of them come to fruition. By pointing out how much she has sacrificed for her relationship and how little the man she loves has reciprocated, she establishes that she needs equally reciprocated respect and love. This creates an identity for listeners who might be aided in the realization that they have this same need by listening to her music and finding that they relate to it.

Hill victimizes herself using another point of dissatisfaction: the way she is treated because of her race. Overall, she frames people of her race as powerless and victims of the institutions in which they are living. She sings, “And then amend it, every law that ever prevented/Our survival since our arrival documented in The Bible,” stating that she wants to amend every law that has ever prevented the survival of African Americans since their arrival through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. According to Hill, multiple laws have been made with the purpose of hindering African American *survival*. The extreme and malicious nature of these laws is proof that African Americans are victims. She goes on to claim their disenfranchisement by saying, “It seems we lose the game/Before we even start to play/Who made these rules? (Who

made these rules?)/We're so confused (We're so confused)/Easily led astray.” She is saying here that African Americans are on such an uneven playing field that they lose the game before they even get a chance to play. They are denied opportunity before they even get to vie for it because of their skin color. She is wondering exactly why the world is this way – there is no fair reason why they should have made these rules. On top of being dealt an unfair hand, they do not have a clear idea about how to navigate a world that mistreats them, and their success in life is hindered as a result. She further establishes their victimhood by posing a rhetorical question: “Why black people always be the ones to settle?” In other words, black people typically don’t get their first choice on anything. Clearly this is not fair. In the context of ego-function theory, Hill is making the point that the ego is not being served as fully as it should be. Therefore, she and other African Americans are victims because of the color of their skin.

Finally, she establishes herself as a victim on a personal level by claiming that she is manipulated. She does not make the claim that she is manipulated *because* of her skin color or her status as a woman, but she leaves open the possibility that these characteristics could contribute. First she discusses a problem commonly faced by women – living up to other people’s expectations of who she is and how she should behave. In “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill” she sings, “And every time I try to be, what someone else has thought of me/So caught up, I wasn't able to achieve.” She is lamenting the fact that she has been manipulated by what “someone else has thought” of the way she should “be.” She got caught up in trying to fulfill these expectations and please others that she couldn't achieve what she wanted to. Therefore, she is a victim of manipulation. She also makes this claim in “Lost Ones” when she says, “Some wan' play young Lauryn like she dumb.” Her age and perhaps other unmentioned characteristics make her a victim to getting “played” like she’s “dumb.” Because she is manipulated, her ego is

damaged. This establishes her and anyone else who identifies with the theme of manipulation victims.

Establishment and Demonization of Enemy

In order to be a victim, one must have an enemy. Therefore, it follows that the next stage in ego-function theory is the establishment and demonization of an enemy. Establishment of enemy contains language that points out the existence of an enemy. In Gregg's words, this is to "locate what one perceives as the persons, behaviors, actions, or conditions which cause or contribute to feelings of inadequacy." These persons, behaviors, actions, or conditions are not yet condemned, their existence is simply made known to the audience. Once the enemy is established, it is demonized – its character is disparaged. As Gregg explains, the enemy becomes a target that is used "for arrows of scorn, ridicule, condemnation, and charges of character defect."

Hill establishes her enemy by speaking in a hostile and defiant way towards those who oppress her in any context. This often occurs through the use of language that empowers herself. She sings in "Lost Ones," "Now understand 'L-Boogie's' non-violent/But if a thing test me, run for my gun/Can't take a threat to my new born son/L been this way since creation." Here she is saying that she never uses violence, but that if someone crosses her she'll fight back with a gun, especially if it means protecting her son. This line is not directed at one specific enemy – it instead makes an enemy out of absolutely anyone who will "test" her. By threatening this entity with a gun, she is establishing it as an enemy. She does not, however, disparage the character of anyone who tests her, meaning she isn't yet demonizing. Later in the same song she says, "My

emancipation don't fit your equation.” This lyric refers to her becoming single, which wasn't in the plans of the man she left. By making it clear that the man was not happy with her decision which in turn made her feel negatively, she establishes him as her enemy. She is making it clear that the two of them are at odds, but is not yet demonizing him. She talks about the same relationship in “Ex-Factor” when she says, “And when I try to walk away/You'd hurt yourself to make me stay.” She is making clear that there is a conflict between her and this man, and that he makes her feel negatively. Therefore, she is establishing him as an enemy. All of these enemies – whether they are a man, or anyone who oppresses her in general – are entities that contribute to feelings of “inadequacy,” as Gregg words it.

Next, Lauryn Hill moves on to frame her enemies – those who make her feel inadequate – with scorn, ridicule, and condemnation. This happens primarily in her discussion about the man who does not reciprocate her love and men in general. She demonizes their carelessness, unfaithfulness, and selfishness. In “It Hurts So Bad” she sings, “Found out the man I'd die for/He wasn't even concerned.” He showcases his carelessness by juxtaposing the fact that she would *die* for him and he can't even be bothered to feel concerned, thereby demonizing him. She writes about his unfaithfulness in “Lost Ones”: “A groupie call, you fall from temptation/Now you wanna bawl over separation/Tarnish my image in the conversation.” When a groupie of his band calls, he is easily persuaded to cheat on Lauryn. When he does and Lauryn stands up for herself by ending their relationship, he is upset about it. Even worse, her image is tarnished by the entire situation because other people know that he cheated on her. The fact that the line is written in present tense makes it clear that the two of them have gone through this multiple times. By writing about his repeated bouts of unfaithfulness, she disparages his character and demonizes her enemy. Finally, she discusses the selfishness of men in general in “Doo Wop (That Thing)”:

“The second verse is dedicated to the men/More concerned with his rims and his Timbs than his women.” The men that she and her friends are involved with typically care more about insignificant things than they do about the women they are dating. By stating that those insignificant things are material objects whose only benefit is touting the man’s image, she paints these men as shallow and selfish. This serves to demonize them.

After establishing the self as a victim, Hill goes through the process of establishing and demonizing the enemy that actually makes her feel like a victim. This process functions as a key pivot point between victimization and reaffirmation. According to Gregg, demonizing enemies allows the speaker to “reject them, flaunt them, strike out against them, and so gain some initiative of action.” In other words, framing the enemy as wicked allows victimizers to provide a target for the source of oppression. This target must be established in order to take a stand against the oppression. The speaker goes on to take that stand in the next stage of ego-function theory, reaffirmation of the ego.

Reaffirmation of Ego

Once a speaker establishes themselves as a victim and then demonizes their enemy, they are able to move on to both reaffirm their ego and sometimes assert ego-superiority. As Gregg says, “As a result of attacking enemies, protestors appear to experience and express feelings of ego-enhancement, ego-affirmation, and even ego-superiority.” This occurs because the enemy provides a sort of reference point against which the protestor can create their own identity. “The perceived adversary becomes a symbolic enemy, helpful in the process of purging the ills of self and in the process of identifying self by identifying against others,” as Gregg explains.

In *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, reaffirmation of ego happens frequently. She reaffirms her talents as an emcee, her identity as an African American, and her own empowerment. In order to reaffirm her musical talent, she contrasts her success now with her first job at Foot Locker in “Superstar.” “I used to work at Foot Locker, they fired me: I fronted/Or I quitted, now I spit it -- however do you want it!/Now you get it, writing rhymes, in the Range, with the frames/Lightly tinted,” she sings. Not only is she talented enough at what she does not to work in a blue collar job anymore, she can also afford a souped-up Range Rover. She also brags about her talents in “Final Hour” when she says, “It's abuse how I juice up this beat, like I'm deuce.” She's so good at rapping that she practically has the ability of two people put together; it's so good it's “abuse.” She is able to reaffirm her talents here because any enemy who has taken a stand against her and made her feel inadequate (like a victim) has been demonized and therefore their opinion is discounted. The same pattern follows in her discussion of being African American. “And then amend it, every law that ever prevented/Our survival since our arrival documented in The Bible/Like Moses and Aaron/Things gon' change, it's apparent/And all the transparent gonna be seen,” she sings in “Final Hour.” She mentions the laws that hinder African American survival, and then goes on to reaffirm the race's well-being by saying that things are going to change. She also alludes to African American culture in “Everything is Everything” when she says, “Rap this in fine linen, from the beginning.” The word “linen” refers to the very characteristically African head-wrap. By calling it “fine” she is asserting black pride. Even though she previously sings about the ways in which African Americans are victims, she is able to logically reaffirm her pride in being black because she took a stand against those who victimize her race. Finally, she reaffirms her own empowerment. In “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill” she says, “And every time I try to be, what someone else has

thought of me/So caught up, I wasn't able to achieve/But deep in my heart, the answer it was in me/And I made up my mind to define my own destiny.” The people who forced their expectations on her are her enemies, and she is a victim because she wasn’t able to achieve what she wanted to. But by taking a stand against those people, it follows that she could reaffirm her own power in this situation – she found the answer within her and defined her own destiny instead of letting her enemy do it for her. All of these examples help to create identity by reaffirming aspects of the ego. Hill and her listeners build a positive identity this way.

Sometimes, Hill will go even further than simply reaffirming herself – she asserts herself as superior to her enemy. Once again, she does this within the context of her talents as an emcee, love, and her own self-worth. To assert the superiority of her musical talent, she sings in “Everything is Everything,” “You can't match this rapper slash actress/More powerful than two Cleopatras.” By telling her enemy that they “can’t match” her in her ability, and that she is even more “powerful than two Cleopatras,” she is saying she is better than both her enemy and Cleopatra. Additionally, she says in “Lost Ones,” “My ting done made your kingdom wan' run.” In other words, her music made her enemy’s “kingdom” want to retreat, thereby making her the winner. She goes on to state that she is superior than the man she loved in “I Used to Love Him”: “Cause with all that’s going on I got the world in my palm/Father you saved me and you showed me that life/Was much more than being some foolish man's wife.” By saying that her life is about so much more than being married, and by calling the man “foolish,” she asserts her superiority over him. She does the same in “Lost Ones” when she says, “You might win some but you just lost one/You might win some but you just lost one.” She repeats this brag aimed at the man she left multiple times. By stating that her leaving is a loss to him, she is making the case that she is superior to any other woman he’ll be with. Finally, she talks about her own worth

in “Lost Ones.” She sings, “Some wan' play young Lauryn like she dumb/But remember not a game new under the sun/Everything you did has already been done.” In other words, people mistake her youth for naivety, but she is not. In fact, she’s wiser than the people trying to play her like she’s dumb. Therefore, she is superior to them.

All of these examples serve to enhance the ego and therefore create a positive identity for her and her listeners. This happens because, according to Gregg, “The rhetoric of attack becomes at the same time a rhetoric of ego-building, and the very act of assuming such a rhetorical stance becomes self-persuasive and confirmatory.” In other words, attacking her enemy allows for the confirmation of whatever aspects of identity she chooses to affirm.

Limitations of Ego-function Theory

There are many times when *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* creates identity for Lauryn and her listeners *without* engaging in any of the three stages of ego-function. Hill alternatively creates identity in two ways. The first is by weaving in the themes of religion and distrust into her lyrics to reinforce their relevance to her identity. The second is by making declarations of attitudes that her listeners can adopt.

First, by repeatedly writing about the theme of religion, Lauryn makes it clear that God is a very important part of her life. She does so first with simple statements about her own faith such as “Now I know his strength is within me” in “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,” and faith in the context of other people’s lives such as “Forgive them father for they know not what they do” in “Forgive Them Father.” Additionally, She credits God completely with the creation of her baby boy in “To Zion”: “A beautiful reflection of His grace/See I know that a gift so great/Is

only one God could create.” She also makes clear how important God is to her in “I Used to Love Him” when she says, “But my heart is gold I took back my soul/And totally let my creator control/The life which was his to begin with.” In her eyes, her entire life was created by and belongs to God. By constantly hearing religious references, those who listen to this album could very well be influenced to enhance their own relationship with religion, or reinforce an existing one.

Hill also weaves in a theme much less characterized by faith: distrust. By constantly being advised to distrust those around them, the album’s listeners might be influenced to take on an attitude of distrust, which in turn would become a part of their identity. She first advises distrust in the context of love in “Forgive them Father”: “It took me a little while to discover/Wolves in sheep coats who pretend to be lovers/Men who lack conscience will even lie to themselves, to themselves/A friend once said, and I found to be true/That everyday people, they lie to God too/So what makes you think, that they won't lie to you?” She is warning here against men who lie to themselves, to God, and to women. She further dramatizes this warning by using vivid language like “wolves in sheep coats.” She continues these warnings in the same song, saying “Beware the false motives of others/Be careful of those who pretend to be brothers/And you never suppose it's those who are closest to you.” This is an even more extreme warning – even the people who are closest to you could be pretending to be your “brother” and don’t actually care about your best interest as much as you believe. Lyrics confirming an attitude of distrust and advising listeners to be wary of other people’s intentions could promote the same attitude and behavior in listeners, thereby making distrust a part of their identity.

Finally, Hill’s music contributes to listeners’ identity when it makes declarations that promote certain attitudes. By listening to the album, her audience might be persuaded to take on

these attitudes as well. For example, in “Nothing Even Matters” Lauryn sings about the man she loves, saying “You're part of my identity/I sometimes have a tendency/To look at you religiously.” Making this statement might make her listeners feel enabled to see their own significant others as part of their identities and to look at them religiously. In a skit at the beginning of “To Zion,” a teacher says to the class, “I know none of the guys been in... we don't get in love, right? Oh! Let this black man right here tell what his idea of love is, ‘cause not all the time we hear a young black man talk about love.” The teacher states as a fact that young black men don't talk about love. The young black men listening to this album might listen to this monologue and decide that they are not supposed to talk about love. If this were to happen, he would be adopting the album's lyric as a part of his identity. Finally, Lauryn sings about her unintended pregnancy in “To Zion.” She says, “I knew his life deserved a chance/But everybody told me to be smart/"Look at your career," they said/"Lauryn baby use your head."/But instead I chose to use my heart.” She is telling her listeners that she prioritized her personal life over her career. Those who identify with Hill or look up to her might be influenced to do the same if they were to face the same situation. In all of these examples, the album makes statements that could be influential to the right listener. When the listener adopts the attitudes stated in the album as their own, the music is contributing to the listener's identity.

None of the methods Hill uses here to create identity can be interpreted as any of the stages of ego-function. They do not victimize the ego, create and demonize an enemy, or reaffirm the ego. Instead, they discuss personal experiences that don't involve a feeling of victimhood, an enemy, or any reaffirmation of superiority. Instead, they promote themes and attitudes that could influence listeners' identities. Therefore, we can conclude that, while ego-

function theory does explain a lot of the identity creation in *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*,

there is more to it that cannot be explained by the theory.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This thesis attempted to answer the question of how Kanye West and Lauryn Hill create identity for themselves and, simultaneously, their listeners. The analysis started by establishing the status of music as rhetoric and its relevance to identity. It continued on to summarize the history of hip-hop, how the genre has treated women, two of its most prominent sub-genres, and how it has been a standout genre in influencing identity. Then I justified Kanye West's and Lauryn Hill's merit and qualification to serve as worthy cases with which to analyze identity creation. Next, I summarized Richard Gregg's concept of ego-function, which is used in this paper to operationalize identity creation. In doing so, I explained the three stages: victimization of ego, demonization of enemy, and reaffirmation of ego. After this summary I reviewed the literature that puts Gregg's concept to use.

The analysis moves on to analyze Kanye West. It focused on his debut album, *The College Dropout*, which was released in 2004. It justified the use of this album as a case with which to analyze ego-function by asserting its success and merit. I analyzed how ego-function applies in the album, working through the three stages of the theory. I claimed that West frames himself and those who identify with him as victims using the themes of instilled inferiority, interaction with law enforcement, and exploitation by whites. I claimed that he uses similar themes to establish and demonize his enemy, which he does once again within the context of interracial conflict. Then, I claimed that he discounts white's opinions of blacks to reaffirm his ego and even assert ego-superiority. Finally, I analyzed the ways in which West creates identity for his listeners *without* using ego-function, which he does using the themes of religion and dreams of a better life, as well as by making vulnerability-inducing personal statements.

Next I analyzed Lauryn Hill. I focused her analysis on her solo debut album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, which was released in 1998. I justified using this album as a case with which to analyze ego-function by summarizing its success and merit. I analyzed how ego-function applies in the album, working through the three stages of the theory. I made the claim that she establishes herself and those who identify with her as victims of love, race, and manipulation. Then, I explained how she establishes and demonizes her enemies – mostly the man who scorned her and those who mistreated her as a black woman. Third, I claimed that she reaffirmed her ego within the context of her talents as an emcee, her identity as an African American, and her own self-worth. Finally, I analyzed the ways in which Hill creates identity for her listeners *without* using ego-function, which she does using the themes of religion and distrust, as well as making declarations of attitudes for her listeners to adopt.

Although both the lyrics written by both Kanye West and Lauryn Hill fulfill the three stages of ego-function, there are differences in the language used between the two. The first difference occurs in the first stage of ego-function, victimization of the self. In this stage, Kanye West uses language that frames the world as a force that is out to get him. Most of the lyrics that fulfill this stage use the word “they” or “them” in opposition to “me” or “I.” This contrasts with the manner in which Lauryn Hill establishes herself as a victim, which is characterized more often by one-on-one conflict. Even when she is speaking about the injustices she faces due to her race, she doesn’t frame the conflict as “them” versus “me.” Instead, she establishes the victim as “us.” The second difference occurs in the second stage of ego-function, demonizing the enemy. Kanye’s language is different from Lauryn’s in this section in its violence and use of curse words. Almost all of the lyrics that achieve demonization of the enemy in *The College Dropout* contain swear words. On the other hand, none of Lauryn’s do. The third and final difference

occurs in the third stage of ego-function, reaffirmation of ego. In this stage, Kanye's lyrics take on a lot more of a resentful tone than Lauryn's lyrics do. He consistently denounces and degrades his enemy's point of view. In contrast, Lauryn is a lot less resentful of the enemy in her reaffirmation. Instead, she sticks to promoting the things she believes in. Overall, Kanye's lyrics take on a more violent tone than Lauryn's do.

As both artists are African American, this analysis raises the question of how their music speaks to listeners of different ethnicities. I will make the argument that listeners of all ethnicities relate similarly to discussion of any theme that is not race-related. Both artists write about themes that have little to do with the fact that they are African American, like insecurity and love. When they write about these themes, they do not do so through the lens of someone who is black in America. Lyrics about these themes are completely devoid of any references to race. As a white woman, I do not feel that there are any barriers to my understanding of their discussions of these themes. Instead, I can relate as completely as I would to music written by a white person. However, I will also argue that although I feel this way, it is possible that both Hill and West do not think that I can relate as completely. Although these themes are not directly about being black, there is a possibility that the way they write about them is different because of the fact that they *are* black. If this were the case, there would be no way for me or any other non-African American person to know if we are understanding the lyrics the way the artists intended them to be understood. When the artists are speaking about the black experience, I believe that non-black listeners use it as a form of education. Because people have a tendency to self-segregate across racial lines, and because of hip-hop lyrics' incredibly personal nature, I think that hip-hop music provides non-blacks with an opportunity to understand the black experience at an unprecedentedly personal level. I would argue that non-black listeners know that they

cannot fully relate and do not claim to fully relate to the type of injustices that African Americans face. But listening to black artists discuss the challenges they face can be eye opening for those who do not face the same challenges and thereby serve to increase mutual understanding.

Because this thesis analyzes artists of two different genders, we can make inferences about gender's relationship with ego-function theory. In particular, we are interested in whether the language of ego-function differs between genders? I noticed first that Kanye engages in ego-function focused mostly on the injustices he faces as an African American, while Lauryn's also included the themes of love and self-worth. Additionally, the ego-affirmation stage was much more prevalent in Lauryn's album than in Kanye's. Perhaps we can infer that female artists reflect on a more diverse set of aspects of life than male artists, and that they feel a stronger need to reaffirm their identities. It is important to note that this entire conclusion operates on the sweeping assumption that both Kanye West and Lauryn Hill write music that is representative of all male and female hip-hop artists. More research should be done in order to determine how true this assumption is.

In light of the sections that address the limitations of ego-function theory, I think it would be appropriate to add to ego-function theory in two ways. First, the theme of religion was a major theme in both albums and, I believe, a contributor to identity. Therefore, I think that the theory could extend by claiming that identity is affirmed with the sense of divine belonging. Second, there were many times when both artists made statements about their values that listeners could adopt as their own either because (1) they assume that having these values is the status quo or (2) they admire the artists enough to want to emulate them. Therefore, the theory

could extend to say that statements of values (statements that have nothing to do with being a victim or identifying an enemy) by protestors contribute to identity.

In concluding this paper, the question of real-world applicability arises. Gregg's theory makes sense on paper, but do listeners of these two albums feel that the lyrics and themes have actually had an impact on their identities? If yes, is it because of the claims laid forth by ego-function theory? I have attempted to prove that these albums share the characteristics of protest rhetoric outlined in the theory's three stages: first they make a case for the protestor's status as a victim, then they demonize an enemy, and finally they reaffirm their worth. Is this a process that listeners are aware of, consciously or unconsciously? It would be helpful to have interviewed African American listeners as well as listeners of other ethnicities in order to find out how true the claims made in this analysis actually are.

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