'First things first, I'm the realest': Linguistic appropriation, white privilege, and the hip-hop persona of Iggy Azalea[1]

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The 'hip-hop nation' is a multiethnic, transnational community that originates from and privileges urban African American experiences. Scholars have explored ways that non-African Americans worldwide use linguistic features of African American English (AAE) as a way of constructing hip-hop affiliated identities. The current paper ties these strands together in a study of the linguistic patterns of white Australian rapper Iggy Azalea, who makes use of AAE in her music, but not in other public speech. Our study presents a variationist analysis of copula absence in her lyrics. Findings show that her rates of this hallmark feature of AAE are extremely high, when compared to similar analyses of other rappers. We argue that her overzealous application of AAE features in her music, in order to create a specific linguistic style, enables a success that rests ultimately on the appropriation of African American language and culture, and the privilege that whiteness affords.

KEYWORDS: Performance, stylization, African American English, hip-hop, white privilege, linguistic appropriation

INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguists have become increasingly attuned to the ways in which language is stylized and manipulated in performative contexts (Bell and Gibson 2011; Coupland 2007). While earlier work sought only the most unselfconscious, 'authentic' vernacular speech (Labov 1972), performance has come into focus as offering an important lens through which to view the active construction of social identities (Barrett 1999; Coupland 2011; Schilling-Estes 1998). In some sense, all language is performed; as social actors, speakers constantly make choices that aid in their own project of identity construction (Goffman 1981). We are concerned more directly with 'high performance' (Coupland 2007), in which actors rely on stylized forms of language, which serve to emphasize ideological connections to particular

social identities, and often to exaggerate them. Performers are actively constructing in these contexts a persona that is not themselves; they are simultaneously 'indexing both a social identity and the fact that it is not their own' (Bell and Gibson 2011: 564). As a case in point, Barrett's (1999) work on African American drag queens effectively exemplifies the linguistic work done in order to 'style the other' (Bell 1999), resulting in the highlighting of a multiplicity of identities. Barrett shows that by drawing on stereotypical women's language, African American English, overt sexual comments, and gay double entendres, performers all at once claim an identity as African American men, reject the notion that they desire to be white women, and call into question essentialized notions of raced and gendered categories.

An important line of inquiry within scholarship on performance has been to interrogate ways that linguistic forms become imbued with racialized meanings and linked ideologically to racialized categories. This includes work on crossing (Cutler 1999; Rampton 1995), mock language (Chun 2009; Hill 2001), and linguistic minstrelsy (Bucholtz and Lopez 2011). Linguistic minstrelsy is a form of 'figurative blackface', in which white users of African American English (AAE) do not literally darken their skin with make-up as in turn-of-the-century minstrel shows (Lott 2013), but in essence perform in blackface, drawing on linguistic and other symbolic elements that signify racialized ideologies to a wide U.S. audience. As Bucholtz and Lopez (2011) show, such linguistic performances tend to be drastically reduced from the full linguistic system they represent, and often blatantly disregard the grammatical rules that govern the language. In literature on these forms of outgroup language use, scholars demonstrate how linguistic representations of ethnic and racial minorities reflect a deeply racist system in the U.S. It is important, however, to keep in mind that not all outgroup uses of AAE reflect systemic racism and white privilege in this same way. There is a solid body of literature that uncovers native-like uses of AAE by whites far removed from the appropriation and minstrelsy found in works like those described above. Authors such as Hatala (1976), Sweetland (2002), and Fix (2014) all show ways in which whites who have a sense of belonging in African American communities can use AAE in a native-like manner, rather unproblematically, in a very different way from the commodified forms more typically found among white speakers. White persons, then, are not constrained by their race to use of particular language, or avoidance of other types of speech, just as African Americans (or any other racial or ethnic group) are not tied to specific language forms. To assume as much would be to bind together essentialized notions of race and language, which is far from what we intend to do. Rather, we wish here to examine a very particular type of AAE use: a non-native user performing the language in a native-like manner, commodifying blackness for increased profitability in the marketplace.

In this article, we argue that even seemingly authentic language use involving appropriation of racially-linked forms is at its core not different from

the linguistic minstrelsy and mock language that reflect whites' ongoing participation in and upholding of the status quo racist structure. We consider the linguistic construction of a hip-hop persona in the music of white Australian-born rapper Iggy Azalea. Although the language in the songs represents a range of AAE much expanded from usual observations of non-native use of the variety, it is the wholesale appropriation of this language, along with discourses of race and the content of her music, in which she subscribes to stereotyped notions of blackness, that support our claim that Iggy Azalea represents a particularly salient example of a white hegemony that views black cultural resources as ripe for the strategic picking.

    We first outline important literature in studies of language and hip-hop, then move on to a description of how white rappers have engaged with race in different eras of the genre. We provide a biographical sketch of Iggy Azalea, and present a detailed look at the way in which she incorporates AAE into her music. This is done through a description of the features that appear in her music, followed by a quantitative analysis of one such feature, copula absence. As a whole, we argue that Iggy Azalea's participation in the hip-hop world, and especially her success within it, rest heavily on her whiteness and the ensuing privilege it bestows.

LANGUAGE IN THE HIP-HOP NATION

The term 'hip-hop nation' (Alim 2004) refers to the imagined community that spans the globe, whose members consume and create the music, and live the lifestyle associated with hip-hop.[2] Hip-hop originated in urban centers of African American life on the East Coast of the U.S., arising from the severely depressed socio-economic conditions and extreme marginalization of youth of color during the 1970s (Chang 2005). The genre developed as the repressive policies of the Reagan-Bush era further subjugated poor communities of people of color (Morgan 2001). In the following decades, it has grown into a nationally- and internationally-popular phenomenon. In the U.S., whites, many from suburban, affluent areas, constitute a substantial portion of the hip-hop market (Kitwana 2005). Rose (2008: 88) reports not only that whites consume significantly more hip-hop than African Americans, making up 60 percent of the market, as opposed to African Americans at 25 percent in 2006, but also that the 'racial consumption gap' continues to widen. Globally, the hip-hop movement has given voice to those resisting oppressive conditions in which they find themselves. In Colombia, Palestine, and elsewhere, members of the hip-hop nation use rap music as a vehicle to express their discontent and their push to subvert the norms of their lives (Alim, Ibrahim and Pennycook 2009; Pennycook 2003). Hip-hop thus serves as a means for solidarity among the 'connective marginalities' of the world (Osumare 2001).

    As a creative movement originating in African American communities, the language of hip-hop has a strong relationship to AAE, which itself has been the

topic of a vast amount of scholarship (see Green 2002; Rickford 1999). AAE is the language of the hip-hop nation (Smitherman 2006), though as Alim (2002) notes, few studies have quantitatively probed the precise overlap of the two codes. For example, Edwards's (1998) survey of hip-hop finds that AAE features are used only on a token basis in the music. Both in the U.S. and globally, this has the effect of making the music accessible to a wide audience, which comprises many non-speakers of AAE. Globally, hip-hop has been framed as an 'autonomous market' (Park and Wee 2008), which invites and embraces incorporation of AAE into locally-produced music (Pennycook 2003). By contrast, in the U.S., such appropriation by cultural outsiders is often met with suspicion and criticism, bringing to the fore the long-standing racial and power imbalance, as well as the unbridled commodification of black culture that persists in the country (Tate 2003).[3] While it would be dangerous to racialize rap music completely, given its widespread reach both domestically and globally, the genre without a doubt retains its primary ties to black experience and artistry (Cutler 2003; Morgan and Bennett 2011); moreover, stemming from historical and current circumstances of race relations in the U.S., there may be a great deal of tension and suspicion surrounding white participation in and gain from the hip-hop industry.

The story of whites co-opting black cultural forms, and then enjoying more profit than those whose creative powers initially produced them, is nothing new. Hip-hop faces the same fate as jazz and the blues, for example, as a sizeable portion of record sales are made to whites, and white record executives are at the top of the billion-dollar industry.[4] Such processes are at the core of white privilege, whereby whiteness is an invisible racial category, setting societal norms, and through which whites are at an advantage at practically every turn (Feagin 2010; Rothenberg 2012). As Hill (2008) argues, appropriation is a central component of the system of race in the U.S. She writes, 'The constitution of White privilege, achieved by recruiting both material and symbolic resources from the bottom of the racial hierarchy, Color, to the top, Whiteness, is one of the most important projects of White racist culture' (2008: 158).

There is a rich tradition of examining uses of AAE by whites, beginning notably with Hatala (1976), and developed more fully within Rampton's (1995) work on crossing, which he defines as 'the use of language varieties associated with social or ethnic groups that the speaker does not usually "belong" to' (1995: 14). Fix (2010) provides a nuanced comparison of three different uses of AAE by white women. She shows that inauthentic, mediated performances of blackness contrast sharply with the language of white women who are members of the African American community, and whose language indicates native speaker-like mastery of the variety (also see Sweetland 2002). These women tend to avoid stereotypical, salient features of AAE, often drawn from highly stylized representations, and more closely associated with non-native uses of the variety. Fix (2010: 64) writes,

In the case of community speakers, where conscious use of language ends and unconscious use begins is not so clear, but the community speakers' differential use of AAE features may indicate their larger awareness of the cultural stereotype within the media with whom they are aligned.

Cutler's (2003, 2009) work on white hip-hoppers has been particularly revealing in the ways in which whites negotiate meanings of authenticity, as racially marked Others within a normatively African American culture. While hip-hop has extended far beyond the African American urban neighborhoods where it originated, it continues to privilege urban African American experiences. As such, individuals who view themselves as members of the hip-hop nation may struggle to present themselves as authentic, and may be confronted about the legitimacy of such a claimed identity. In Cutler's (2003) work, 'core' hip-hop members (who participate in practices such as MCing) tend to use fewer features of AAE, while 'peripheral' speakers 'tend to be bolder in their use of these particular features of AAE' (2003: 218). Cutler's analysis centers on participants' understanding of the hip-hop mantra 'keeping it real', meaning 'that people should be true to their roots and give "props" or credit where credit is due' (2003: 218; see also Smitherman 2006). Language is certainly a central part of adhering to this ideal:

> there is perhaps also a sense that trying to sound too black might actually make one less 'real' because one is trying to be something one is not; that is, respecting ethnolinguistic boundaries is an essential part of 'keeping it real' because it is an acknowledgement that one is not trying to be black. (Cutler 2003: 226)

For example, Cutler (2009) shows that white MC Eyedea includes salient linguistic features that are indexical of whiteness, such as 'hyper-rhotic /r/', contrasting with the /r/-lessness often viewed as marking African American identity (Rahman 2008). Similarly, the Beastie Boys, who became popular in the 1980s, rapped with high-pitched, nasal voices readily identified as white. Their choice of important linguistic signals effectively showed that they were immersed in hip-hop without mimicking blackness, thus enabling acceptance in the culture (Hess 2005).

In contrast, Vanilla Ice stands as an example of a white rapper's failed attempt to succeed in hip-hop: he tried to imitate blackness through creation of a false autobiographical background which asserted close connections to African American social and physical space, relying on the ghetto as 'a source of fabricated white authenticity' (Rose 1994: 11). In fact, it was discovered that Vanilla Ice had been born and raised in an affluent suburb rather than a poor urban neighborhood, and his associations with gang-related life were tenuous at best. Paired with the absence of discourse about his own race (save for his stage name), Vanilla Ice attempted to claim authenticity by laying claim to cultural blackness. Once this was revealed, his musical career quickly came to an end, and his name remains a marker of inauthenticity in hip-hop even today.

Eminem, a white rapper from the Detroit area who became popular in the late 1990s (backed by Dr. Dre), continues to be successful today, and strives to avoid being viewed as another Vanilla Ice. This may be partly a result of Eminem's background, in an impoverished, largely African American neighborhood. Instead of downplaying his whiteness, Eminem engages in discourses that show how his race is sometimes a detriment to his success in the hip-hop world, while also relying on his lower-class background to help authenticate his presence therein (Hess 2005). This bolsters his image with respect to hip-hop's critical awareness of already-rich whites yielding extreme profits from rap. Within Eminem's lyrics, he calls attention to the fact that his race is marked:

1. Some people only see that I'm white, ignoring skill / 'Cause I stand out like a green hat with a orange bell (*Role Model*)

Additionally, Eminem also actively challenges the racist system from which he benefits as a white man:

2. Look at my sales / Let's do the math / If I was black / I would've sold half (*White America*)
3. Became a commodity / Because I'm W-H-I-T-E / 'Cause MTV was so friendly to me (*I'm Back*)

Such lyrics indicate Eminem's awareness of how the racist system in the U.S. operates, illustrating that his own project for authenticating himself as a member of the hip-hop nation involves the recognition that much of his success is handed to him in large part because of his race (Armstrong 2004; Hess 2005; Kajikawa 2009).[5]

It is from the lens of the history of white appropriation of black cultural resources and engagement with whiteness within hip-hop that we examine the white female rap artist Iggy Azalea. Iggy Azalea (née Amethyst Amelia Kelly) moved to Miami, Florida when she was 16 from Mullumbimby, Australia. She is closely associated with African American rapper T.I., who signed her to his label, Grand Hustle, in 2012, and serves as her mentor, collaborator, and 'ride or die' supporter (Marcus 2014). Unlike Vanilla Ice, Iggy Azalea does not hide the fact that her upbringing was in Australia, rather than from a U.S. city where she might have had direct contact with the idea of African American life central to much of U.S.-based commercial rap. Similarly to Eminem, she makes an effort to show that her roots are humble – that she grew up poor, in a small town, and struggled her way out of this impoverished situation (Hattersley 2013; Heigl 2014). Iggy's climb to fame has been fast. In 2012, she was featured as both the first female and the first non-U.S. artist to appear on *XXL* magazine's Freshman Class, which showcases ten up-and-coming rappers. Since then, her popularity on the charts has been record breaking, with her album *The New Classic* reaching the top spot on *Billboard*'s R&B/Hip-hop

Albums and Top Rap Albums. She additionally broke the record for a female rapper with the longest time with a single (*Fancy*) at Number 1 of the *Billboard* Hot 100 list, a record previously held by Lil' Kim since 2001. *The New Classic* reached the Number 1 Rap Album on *Billboard*; the last female rapper to enjoy that spot was Nicki Minaj with *Pink Friday* in 2012. She won the award for Favorite Rap/Hip Hop Album at the 2014 American Music Awards, and received a Grammy 2015 nomination for Best Rap Album. Her music has certainly been met with negative assessment in addition to praise (e.g. Cooper 2014), much of which has been directed at the fact of her being white Australian and having obviously created a performance persona that clashes drastically with what the public considers to be her 'real' self. This dissonance is a focal point of a great deal of commentary surrounding the artist. Many view her, in other words, as not 'keeping it real'. She has been criticized on this front both in the U.S. and in Australia, being labeled with such terms as 'inauthentic' and a 'wannabe' from media outlets in both places (Butler 2014; Drake 2014; Jarvis 2014). Online comments found below video interviews with Iggy (for example on worldstarhiphop.com and mtv.com) repeatedly focus on what is perceived as her 'fake' accent when she raps and her attempts to 'black-ify' her music, and remark on the enormous gap between her voice on versus off stage.

Our aim for the remainder of this paper is to provide a focused look at the language that Iggy Azalea uses in her music to construct a marketable hip-hop persona. Through evidence of both her 'linguistic hyper performance' (Fix 2010) and her lack of critical assessment of her own whiteness and privilege, we submit that Iggy Azalea represents an extreme and dangerous instance of the long-standing history of the appropriation of black cultural forms by whites, as her linguistic commodification translates into tremendous fame and fortune for a white body performing blackness. We show that her use of AAE is different on the surface from – but fundamentally the same as – the linguistic minstrelsy perpetuated in mainstream culture as black cultural forms are co-opted by whites for their own personal and capital gain.

DATA AND METHODS

We consider Iggy Azalea's entire discography, which includes five albums: *The New Classic* (2014), *Glory* (2012), *Trap Gold* (2012), *Ignorant Art* (2011), and *Reclassified* (2014), on which five new songs were released (in addition to a re-release of seven songs from *The New Classic*, which were included only once in the analysis). We also included five singles that were not on any of the albums. Songs on which Iggy Azalea was featured on another artist's song were not part of the corpus. In total, 48 songs were included. Alim (2002) notes that transcription of rap lyrics is more challenging than the transcription of speech, due to word play and the fluid nature of lyrical constructions. As a starting point, we used lyrics from www.azlyrics.com, which were carefully

compared with the songs by one author and checked by the second for accuracy. Finally, in order to have more than an impressionistic sense of her speech apart from her music, we transcribed five radio interviews with Iggy Azalea, each 10–30 minutes long.[6]

AAE FEATURES IN IGGY AZALEA'S MUSIC

Iggy's music utilizes a wide range of phonological features, beyond stereotypical imitations of AAE (Bucholtz 2011; Bucholtz and Lopez 2011; Cutler 2003). She uses commonly heard features such as:

- monophthongal /ai/ (*rhyme* [rɑːm]);
- /r/-lessness (*mister* [mɪstə]);
- consonant cluster reduction (*piped* [pɑɪp]); and
- interdental fricative changes (*though* [doʊ], *mouth* [mɑʊf], *with* [wɪt]).

She also employs features such as:

- glide weakening of /ɔɪ/ (*boy* [bɔə]);
- fortition of /z/ before nasals (*business* [bɪdnɪs]);
- deletion of nasals with vowel nasalization (*time* [tɑĩ]); and
- laxing of /i/ before /l/ (*feel* [fɪl]); among others.

She does not use these features merely occasionally; rather, she consistently applies AAE phonology throughout her music. For example, she uses monophthongal /ai/ at practically every opportunity, before voiced segments and word finally. At the same time, she avoids monophthongal pronunciations of the vowel in pre-voiceless contexts (e.g. *life* [lɑɪf]), thereby producing the AAE feature in the same environments a native speaker would (cf. Bucholtz and Lopez 2011).

Discourses about Iggy Azalea's music often make reference to the 'sonic Blackness' she displays (Cooper 2014: para. 4), calling out her 'southern US rap drawl' (Jarvis 2014: para. 1), or 'her natural Aussie accent [that] gives way to one that evokes the archetypal Southern rapper' (Butler 2014: para. 2). This likely stems from her close relationship with Atlanta-based rapper T.I. Features that are identified with southern AAE (based primarily on descriptions in Bailey and Thomas 1998) and southern hip-hop (see Bloomquist and Hancock 2013) include upgliding of /ɔ/ (*on* [ɔɔn]), backing of /ʌ/ (*touch* [tʌ⁀tʃ]), the lowering of /ɪ/ before nasals (*thing* [θæ̈ŋ]), and the raising of /æ/ in isolation (*bags* [bæ^gz]). The salient 'urr' variable (associated with St. Louis, rather than broadly southern), appearing in words like *there* and *here* (Blake and Shousterman 2010), occurs only one time (*hair* [hɝ]). Overall, the fact that she cultivates not just a generic AAE style, but one recognized as specifically southern, further exemplifies the highly practiced nature of her performances.

Her use of morphosyntactic features is also striking when compared to other outgroup performances of AAE. Iggy makes extensive use of general vernacular features, such as:

- multiple negation (I *don't* want *none*);
- 3rd person singular *–s* absence (she *go*); and
- couplar *ain't* (If it *ain't* high class).

There are also many instances of features seldom found in stylized AAE performances. These include:

- remote past *BEEN* (got money, *BEEN* had it);
- preterite *ain't* (I *ain't* even graduate);
- completive *done* (Tip *done* made an investment); and
- existential *it* (*It's* some things I never do).

She also employs habitual *be* (My chat room *be* popping), one of the most frequently used but least understood features of AAE by outsiders (Rickford and Rickford 2000). Habitual *be* is often used incorrectly as a substitute for a conjugated copula, rather than with its specific meaning of an action recurring over time. Iggy uses *be* correctly, conveying habitual aspect. There are also examples of *be* used non-habitually (These rumors *be* fables). Alim (2004) identifies this 'equative copula' as a prominent feature in hip-hop language. It is difficult to tell whether these tokens represent incorrectly applied habitual *be* or the equative copula. Given her appropriate uses of habitual *be* elsewhere, as well as the widespread use of equative copula in hip-hop, we consider these to be instances of the latter.

As would be expected in hip-hop lyrics, instances of current slang are plentiful in Iggy's songs, and too numerous to list here. Stylized AAE relies heavily on slang, either current or obviously dated (in the case of linguistic minstrelsy). However, there are exceptions to this in Iggy's lyrics, as she includes words that are part of the more permanent, non-regionally-based AAE lexicon (Major 1994; Smitherman 2000). These words are not tokens of slang, and thus potentially simply indexical of youth culture, but rather lexical items closely connected with African American communities. Examples appear in Table 1.

The word *girl* certainly is not limited to African American usage, but as a discourse marker, which can appear clause-initially or as a free-standing item, and with the particular rising intonation that she employs is specific to African American women's language (Fix 2010; Spears 2009; Troutman 2001). Additionally, the word *thick* indicates a privileging of a female body type that does not conform to current mainstream standards of beauty and desirability, especially with regard to thinness. In the context of the song *New Bitch*, she uses *thick* to describe herself and the jealousy that her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend feels upon seeing her (Iggy is his 'new bitch'). Iggy's description of herself with this term relates to African American discourses, as evidenced, for example, by

Table 1: Words from the African American lexicon in Iggy Azalea's music

Word	Definition	Example (Song)
boojee	An African American of high social status, who looks down upon lower class African Americans (Smitherman 2006b)	Broke hoes think I'm *boojee* (Down South)
finna	Verbal marker used to indicate the immediate future (Green 2002)	Now I'm *finna* kill this shit (My World)
girl	Discourse marker, used with a long, rising intonation, used particularly to convey solidarity between African American women (Spears 2009)	Never measure up to a bitch like me, *girl* (Look At Me Now)
grown	Grown up, mature, responsible and in charge (Smitherman 2006b)	We too *grown* for this messy shit (New Bitch)
thick	A voluptuous female (Smitherman 2000)	Damn she is too *thick* (New Bitch)

the preponderance of references to and sexualization of the female rear end in a great deal of commercial rap (Pough 2007; Richardson 2006; Rose 1994). Iggy's use of this term, then, situates her as an object of desire within accepted norms in hip-hop culture. Like her use of more complex and infrequent forms of AAE phonology and morphosyntax, her use of such lexical items is rare for a non-native speaker, reminiscent of Sweetland's (2002) analysis of Delilah, who regularly uses items from the African American lexicon, and consistently avoids slang. Finally, as is often true of white rappers, Iggy never uses the term *nigga* in her music; although the word is ubiquitous in hip-hop, used by women and men, both as a term of reference and address, its acceptability is restricted to use by African Americans (cf. Cutler 2008). This is one ethnolinguistic boundary that Iggy does not cross.

Taken as a whole, the representation of AAE features in Iggy's lyrics is not dissimilar to that of a native speaker. She shows command over a large number of forms, including some typically indicative of native speaker competency, rather than merely superficial knowledge gained through mediated exposure. This contrasts with many studies of white non-native uses of AAE, which show that such speakers may use features of the language incorrectly, and/or limit their use to a few salient features, which are often shared with other vernacular dialects. The fact that Iggy's use of AAE features is so different from other documented non-native uses underscores the extreme difference between her language on and off the stage (which we expand on below), and shows how much she strains to authenticate herself as a legitimate part of hip-hop. An important question is the extent to which Iggy actually has

mastery over AAE, or is rapping lyrics someone else has written. T.I. has claimed that although artists help each other in the studio, he 'ain't no ghostwriter' and that Iggy 'raps her own rhymes' (Ramirez 2014). Whether or not others help Iggy write her lyrics, she presents the music as her own; in Goffmanian terminology, Iggy is the animator of the lyrics, which are central to the persona she performs, even if she herself is not their author (see Draucker and Collister forthcoming; Squires in preparation).

Undoubtedly, there are people other than Iggy herself who are responsible for her image. Powerful members of the hip-hop industry have helped to create the persona of Iggy Azalea in order to yield great profit; T.I. has been criticized for profiting from a white artist whose career is built on music that remains closely associated with African American experiences. A fierce critic of Iggy, fellow female rapper Azealia Banks has called T.I. 'a fucking shoe-shining coon' for the role he has played in shaping and promoting Iggy Azalea, calling up notions of old-fashioned African American subservience to whites, and modern-day actors who play into stereotypes of blackness for commercial gain. To be sure, many people yield great profit from Iggy's career. It is not to say that these individuals are architects of cultural hegemony (though T.I. has said that he was interested in her in part because of her star potential as a white rapper); at the same time, there is an obviously conscious effort to draw on language and other semiotic resources that index blackness that are 'deployed as part of deliberate and reflexive identity performances' (Bucholtz and Lopez 2011: 681). Thus, the actions of Iggy, T.I., and others involved in her career are reflective of the intertwined systems of racism and privilege in the U.S. To capitalize on these systemic forms of oppression is to be complicit in their maintenance. Thus, the arguments that we make in this paper are not leveled solely at Iggy, though she becomes the primary focus as the performer, but also at others who have had a hand in creating her profitable persona for the marketplace.

VARIATION IN COPULA ABSENCE

To deepen our exploration of Iggy's language, we now focus on copula absence, an iconic feature of AAE. It has been used to demonstrate the control that speakers have when expressing particular identities, such as 'street-consciousness' (Alim 2002), and in terms of code-switching when moving between interlocutors (Alim 2005). We followed the methods in Rickford et al. (1999) for coding copula absence. The copula is variably absent in AAE 'in non-finite, non-past, non-habitual, non-first singular contexts (Bender 2000: 137). Clauses repeated within a song were included only once. Countable cases were coded according to a three-level scheme of distinction: whether the copula was absent (*She not here*), contracted (*She's not here*), or in full form (*She is not here*). There were a total of 304 tokens. Tokens were coded for preceding grammatical environment, indicating whether the subject of the

Table 2: Percentages for straight deletion of copula in Iggy Azalea's music

is		*are*		**Combined**	
79/137	57.6%	147/167	88.0%	226/304	74.3%

sentence was a pronoun or a full noun phrase. Following grammatical environment included seven levels: *gonna*, V-ing, adjective, noun phrase, locative, quotative *like* and miscellaneous. The last two factors were eventually collapsed into one because of small token numbers. Finally, preceding and following phonological environments were included to determine whether the segment (vowel or consonant) before and after the copula constrained its variability.

There are several ways to calculate copula absence, which have different theoretical implications regarding the nature of the AAE copula (whether it is underlyingly present systemically or not),[7] and which may yield drastically different results for the same data (Alim 2002; Rickford et al. 1999). We chose the 'straight deletion' method of calculation, because of the strong theoretical arguments advanced by Rickford and Alim, as well as for comparison across studies. This is achieved by dividing the number of deleted forms by the total number of full, contracted, and deleted tokens. Table 2 shows the percentage of copula absence in Iggy Azalea's lyrics.

In Figure 1, we compare the percentage of copula absence in Iggy's music to Alim's (2002) study of African American rappers Eve (from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) and Juvenile (from New Orleans, Louisiana). We additionally include rates of copula absence in the lyrics of Trina, from Miami, Florida and from Eminem. The same methods for identifying and calculating copula
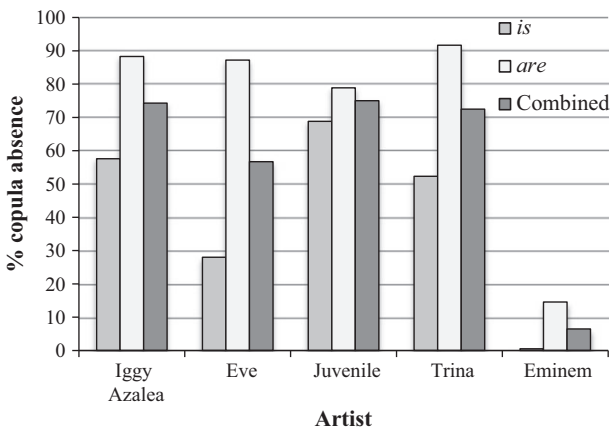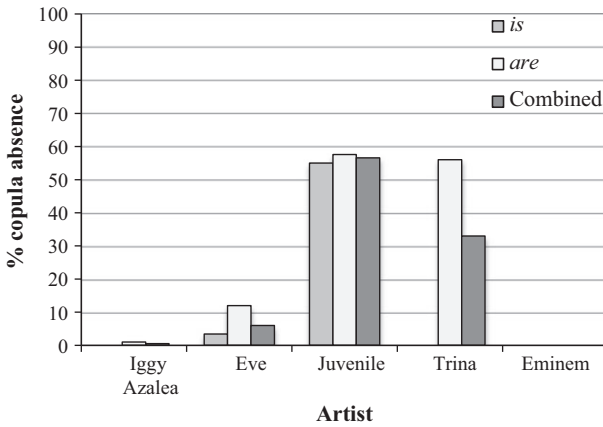
Figure 1: Comparison of copula absence among five artists' lyrics

absence as described above were used for Trina and Eminem, though only the most recent three albums from each artist were analyzed.[8] These inclusions allow for comparisons across gender, race, and location.

Iggy's rates of copula absence are in range of the other artists, with the exception of Eminem, whose rates are far below all others. Eminem presents almost no tokens of copula absence in the lyrics of his songs (0.53% *is*, 14.54% *are*). That is, even though Eminem had contact with and exposure to AAE during his formative years, allowing him more command over these forms than Iggy Azalea, who would have had only mediated access to the language for at least the first sixteen years of her life, he does not rely on performance of AAE in the construction of his hip-hop identity, similar to the 'core' hip-hoppers in Cutler's (2003) work. Iggy's rates of copula absence are much closer to the African American artists' performances. She has the second highest rate in every category. For *is* absence, she is exceeded by Juvenile, who shows 68.8 percent absence, as compared to her 57.6 percent. In terms of absence of *are*, only Trina has a slightly higher rate, of 91.7 percent, compared to 88.3 percent for Iggy. And when the two forms are combined, she, Trina, and Juvenile all have quite similar percentages of absence, of 74.3 percent, 72.5 percent, and 75 percent, respectively. This phenomenon, of an outgroup user showing higher rates than members of the group, is highly unusual in the literature on performance speech (see Bell and Gibson 2011; but also compare Fix 2010).

When interview speech from each of these artists is examined, Iggy Azalea and Eminem stand apart from the other rappers in a very particular way. During radio interviews, Iggy produced a total of 180 countable tokens of the copula (*is* n=104; *are* n=76). In only one instance is the copula absent, and it is at a moment when she is humorously voicing another rapper, Trae the Truth. Thus, copula absence in her off-stage speech is virtually zero percent; that is, she categorically includes the copula when speaking, as she converses in her native variety of Australian English (of which copula absence is not a feature). Eminem also shows no tokens of copula absence in interview speech, whereas all the other rappers do use it in interviews, increasing its frequency in their lyrics, which, Alim (2002) argues, aids in the construction of a 'street-conscious identity' that is crucial to success within hip-hop. The results from interviews are combined in Figure 2.[9]

To find such a dramatic shift towards copula absence in Iggy Azalea's music is remarkable, and indicative of her carefully-constructed hip-hop identity in lyrical performance, even beyond what we would expect from hip-hop artists, who are 'ultraconscious of their speech' (Alim 2002: 300). Furthermore, the fact that she exceeds other artists in every category in her lyrics – artists who themselves make productive use of this feature in their speech – lends support to the claim that Iggy Azalea's use of this iconic feature of AAE is a case of hyper-performance (Fix 2010), and at least partially responsible for the popular perception that her music represents a mimicry of blackness (e.g. Cooper 2014).

Figure 2: Comparison of copula absence among five artists' interview speech

Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regression in Rbrul (Johnson 2009). The model combines tokens of *is* and *are*, which Rickford et al. (1999) demonstrate through a series of statistical comparisons to be the same variable. Two factors were selected as significant predictors: following grammatical environment and following phonological environment.

The linguistic constraints are comparable to previous studies, which have been conducted with native speakers of AAE (and with numerous speakers, as

Table 3: Factor weights for copula absence

	Best run, stepping down		
	Deviance 288.42	Degrees of freedom 7	Grand mean .74
Factor	**N**	**% copula absence**	**Factor weight**
Preceding phonological environment (p < .001)			
vowel	166/194	85	.66
consonant	60/110	54	.33
Following grammatical environment (p < .001)			
V-ing	80/90	88	.70
gonna	18/20	90	.68
locative	33/44	75	.51
adjective	63/84	75	.48
misc	3/6	50	.36
noun phrase	29/60	48	.25

opposed to a single subject, so that social factors are also considered). For following grammatical environment, progressive verbs (V-ing) and *gonna* strongly favor copula absence, while noun phrases strongly disfavor. Preceding grammatical environment was not selected in the model; however, rates mirror previously documented patterns, with more absence following a pronoun (158/185 = 85.4%) and more retention after a full noun phrase (68/119 = 57.1%). Preceding phonological environment shows favoring of absence after vowels and disfavoring in post-consonantal environments.

This quantitative examination of Iggy's language adds depth to the broad picture provided by the description of AAE features in her music. Together, both linguistic descriptions show that her use of AAE in form is much more similar to native speakers of the variety, as opposed to its use among non-native whites who incorporate it (as Iggy does) for reasons of style and performance (Bucholtz and Lopez 2011; Fix 2010). While other white hip-hoppers may be more prudent in their use of AAE, Iggy appears to use AAE overzealously as a central way of positioning herself within hip-hop. Similarly to other rappers, her manipulation of AAE in general, and her prolific use of copula absence in particular, is intended as a way of projecting her identity as a legitimate and authentic member of the hip-hop nation. Clearly, Iggy taps into the emblematic power of this particular linguistic variable as a primary way in which she crafts her performative persona, and shows herself to be aligned with and embodying cultural (notions of) blackness. We are ultimately concerned with the larger ramifications of this, to which we now turn.

DISCUSSION

As discussed above, success as legitimated members of the hip-hop nation for whites often hinges on authenticity, one strategy for which is explicit acknowledgement of whiteness. Iggy Azalea embraces the notion that hip-hop is a multi-racial community, but fails to demonstrate awareness of the extent to which race matters in the U.S. The title of her album *The New Classic*, she says, expresses that 'Hip-hop is evolving', 'can be different', 'any color', and 'from any background' (Dailymotion 2012). While these are not necessarily ideals many in the U.S. hip-hop community would criticize, and certainly reflect those of global hip-hop, such commentary suggests that Iggy's view of herself within hip-hop is one of entitlement. Further, it indicates a rejection of the notion that hip-hop remains an African American cultural art form; in other words, she views her success as indicative of hip-hop's movement away from strong ties to African American culture and communities. There has been a great deal of media attention focused on ways in which white artists such as Macklemore are criticized for their 'race mockery' (D'Addario 2013), for building their careers within the originally African American genre, all the while profiting from playing up stereotypes surrounding this group.[10] This represents yet another layer of the inner workings of white privilege, wherein

whites claim elements of cultural capital as their own, insisting on the erasure of linkages to non-white groups (Gabriel 1998).

Like other white rappers, Iggy includes lyrical references to whiteness, sometimes explicitly:

4. A white girl with flow ain't been seen before (*Goddess*)
5. White bitch go, 'bout to blow like the wind (*D.R.U.G.S.*)

Other times, she references her Australian background (which U.S. audiences may associate with whiteness):

6. Fly Aussie on boss shit (*100*)
7. Aussie ho, I put my country on (*My World*)

Such overt highlighting of her race acknowledges her Otherness in hip-hop, possibly shielding her from accusations of trying to 'be black'. However, unlike other white hip-hoppers, Iggy does not include linguistic features that mark her as white; her extensive, intensive use of AAE phonology and morphosyntax does not wane, even as she makes her race explicit. In this way, we might argue that like present-day minstrels, Iggy uses blackness to highlight her own whiteness. This is borne out in many of her music videos: in *Murda Bizness*, she plays mother to a child beauty pageant contestant (referencing the show *Toddlers and Tiaras*); in *Fancy*, she takes on the role of Cher from the movie *Clueless*. In these videos, the visual, intended to be seen as very white, serves to highlight the contrast with the audio, intended to be heard as unequivocally black. Moreover, like language in the films discussed by Bucholtz and Lopez (2011) and Lopez (2014), themes of Iggy's music center on stereotyped notions of African American life and hip-hop culture: (hyper-)sexuality, violence, drugs, and lavish displays of wealth. As such, she reifies the ideologies of essentialized blackness in listeners' minds, drawing on readily available and popular notions of what it means to be African American.

Her music also includes indirect indices of whiteness through comments on her own body or physical attributes. Analogies between bodies and food items are common metaphors in the music of many African American female rappers, including Azealia Banks, Foxy Brown, and Nicki Minaj. Often, African American female rappers link bodies to foods that make reference to skin tone, such as *chocolate*, *caramel*, and *tootsie roll*. Iggy takes up this lyrical strategy as well, utilizing food metaphors for her own body that reference white complexion, such as *pink pussy*, *banana pudding*, and *vanilla wafer*. Furthermore, drawing attention to her physical looks, sometimes in racialized ways, is a mainstay of her popularity and commercial success, and others frame her as well in a sexualized manner. In an interview for the British newspaper the *Sunday Times* (Hattersley 2013), the reporter introduces the rapper first and foremost based on her physical attractiveness. He provides an

opportunity to discuss race and hip-hop, though her response indicates that she more comfortably engages with her appearance:

> Iggy Azalea, a 22-year-old rapper from Australia, is very talented, arrestingly gorgeous and dresses like a total ho . . . In the bar of a posh London hotel, the girl from rural Oz, with a thick accent to match, arrives in a sexy tracksuit, with a face of make-up one might kindly call 'bordello'. She is pretty mega, actually: supremely sexy and a little bit odd . . . I kick off by asking what was the biggest obstacle to becoming rap's next big thing: being white, being female or from Australia? 'Being from Australia, by far,' she deadpans. 'Everybody loves a pretty white girl.' So it seems.

This response succinctly captures her stance towards whiteness in hip-hop. She is comfortable acknowledging her race, but she does not interrogate what whiteness means in the hip-hop world, nor how it influences her own success. Rather than responding to suggestions that she engage in constructive dialogue about race in the U.S., she dismisses such criticism as coming from 'haters'. This has led to not just the harsh reproaches from critics like Azealia Banks; rapper Q-Tip also publicly recommended that she directly engage with the sociopolitical roots of hip-hop. Her marketing tactics instead hinge on her sexual attractiveness; absent is awareness of the oppressive inner workings of those same notions of beauty and sexuality that are an important part of her public package. Woven tightly in the statement 'Everybody loves a pretty white girl' are strong implications regarding standards of beauty, which privilege white female bodies. Like the food metaphors discussed above, this statement is reminiscent of hip-hop rhetorical strategies, such as braggadocio surrounding sexual appeal and prowess. In both cases, the crucial difference is that African American female rappers use these strategies as a way of inverting dominant cultural ideals, and affirming black female bodies as sexually appealing (Pough 2007; Rose 1994). Iggy relies on these same strategies in promoting her white body as sexually appealing – a body which, as the archetype of beauty and allure, needs no promotion within the cultural imagination. In other words, while black female rappers use hip-hop as a way of *countering* narratives surrounding beauty and sex appeal, Iggy uses hip-hop as a way of *reinforcing* narratives of mainstream ideals surrounding women and their bodies.[11] This is evident also in her music videos: in *Work*, she plays the role of a stripper, with African American female back-up dancers twerking behind her; in *Change Your Life*, she stars as a Vegas showgirl, again surrounded by African American female back-up dancers; and in *Pu$$y*, set in a poor African American neighborhood, she is featured seductively eating a popsicle, and reclining between the legs of a young African American boy, while the word 'pussy' is repeated over and over as the chorus plays. Her success must be viewed within the context of the continued hypermarginalization of African American women – oppressed with respect to both gender and race (Crenshaw 1991; Richardson 2006): 'Iggy profits from the cultural performativity and forms of

survival that Black women have perfected, without having to encounter and deal with the social problem that is the Black female body, with its perceived excesses, unruliness, loudness and lewdness', writes Cooper (2014: para. 19) in a critique of the artist. Iggy Azalea, the self-proclaimed 'pretty white girl', in conjunction with appropriating the language and discursive practices of African Americans, also crafts her public persona around what is desirable and desired of African American female bodies in the mainstream, without having to grapple with, or even acknowledge, the struggles of the lived experiences of African American women across the nation. Such benefits are an integral component of racial privilege and the structural advantages that it imparts on whites.

A final example provides an extreme illustration of Iggy's disregard for racist history and contemporary racial tensions in the U.S., and her participation in the ongoing power imbalance:

8. When it really starts I'm faster than a runaway slave master (*D.R.U.G.S.*)

In the accompanying video, she raps this line while making a whip-like hand motion. Unsurprisingly, this reference to the horrendous slave trade brought a barrage of criticism, along with serious questions about her standing in hip-hop, and reproach of outfits like *XXL* magazine for endorsing her. In discussing negative comments about her lyrical content with respect to race, Iggy does not appear to take seriously concerns about her inclusion of oppressive content (Dailymotion 2012). T.I. argues that because she is Australian, she is not as sensitive to race as are those who have grown up in the U.S. (Marcus 2014). Nevertheless, the likening of herself to a slave master shows – at the very least – a large gap in her cultural competence. While she successfully and accurately imitates AAE in her music, her lack of understanding of the impact of such a reference to slavery, the legacy of which continues to scar the country, indicates all the more that her linguistic performance is best characterized as figurative blackface – another element of the costume she dons for the stage.

CONCLUSIONS

> *Everyone wants to be black until it's time to be black.*

The tweet above was authored by @locoernesto, in reference to the murder of 18-year-old Michael Brown, an unarmed African American male shot to his death in Ferguson, Missouri by a white police officer, as he held his hands in the air on August 9th, 2014. The tweet called out high-profile white musicians, including Iggy Azalea, who incorporate elements of African American style into their performances, all of whom had remained silent about the murder and ensuing protests in the region (also see Charity 2014).

@locoernesto encapsulates the theme developed in this paper: it benefits whites, personally and materially, to adopt aspects of African American culture when and how it is advantageous to do so, while ignoring all of what it means to be non-white in a culture that privileges whiteness. By extension, whites shed such behaviors when it suits them, and have no traces of their foray into blackness attached to them. Whites do not suffer the oppression of systemic racism in the U.S., but rather benefit from its strictures and structures. As Smitherman (2006: 110) so eloquently puts it,

> Notwithstanding the creative genius of Black Style, it is a culture of struggle that gave birth to the 'nigga metaphor.' Whites get it at bargain-basement prices, don't have to pay no dues, but they reap the psychological, social – and economic – benefits of a culture forged in enslavement, neo-enslavement, Jim Crow, apartheid, and continuing hard times.

By co-opting symbolic elements of blackness, and working them to her advantage in the marketplace, Iggy Azalea is an exemplar of Smitherman's critique. She is met with material rewards of blackness far beyond what African Americans reap, and at the same time, reinforces standards of beauty, desirability, and acceptability – all linked to whiteness – already affirmed in popular culture.

In this article, we have examined the performative language of white rapper Iggy Azalea, and have shown that she displays familiarity with and command of a wide range of features of AAE. Drawing comparisons to other rappers, we have shown that she uses copula absence in particular to help construct her performative persona within the hip-hop nation. The incorporation of AAE into her repertoire contrasts starkly with other stylized uses of the variety, by crossers, mockers, and even other white hip-hoppers. As Bucholtz and Lopez (2011: 702) helpfully remind us, there is a 'profound potential for cross-racial linguistic and cultural practices to disrupt the conventional organization of race in majority-white societies'. However, these opportunities are missed in the case of Iggy Azalea. Instead, we have argued that her use of AAE reaffirms ideologies of the language as linked to essentialized notions of blackness, as she crafts her rap lyrics around content stereotypically associated with hip-hop, African Americans, and the imagined ghetto, which helps fuel her own success and monetary gain. She cashes in on the artistic movement created by African Americans, as she 'deliberately attempts to sound like a Black girl, in a culture where Black girls can't get no love' (Cooper 2014: para. 17). To achieve this, she draws on the language of AAE, and the discursive practices of African American female rappers, in order to market her white female body – already celebrated in the Western world, where she and her music have proven to be so incredibly popular.

The specific brand of minstrelsy in Iggy Azalea's performance is one with particularly deleterious effects. Her persona is not a parody, not meant to be

read as amusing, but instead as a serious identity in the hip-hop world. The stereotypes sedimented within the performance reinforce those essentialized ideological linkages to African American peoples and practices. As whites continue to make up a large portion of the market for commercial hip-hop, and continue to be fascinated by African American cultural forms, including language, Iggy Azalea's prominence and success give further motivation to those who also see the potential rewards of the cultural capital of blackness, and who are eager to assume everything but its burdens.

NOTES

1. The authors are greatly indebted to Sonya Fix, Sonja Lanehart, and Chris Taylor, for providing insightful comments that helped to advance the arguments presented here. Additionally, we are grateful to the Editors and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions for strengthening the paper. Any remaining faults are our own.
2. Following Cutler (2003) and others, we use 'hip-hop' as a broadly encompassing term, referring to both the culture and its internal components: breakdancing, graffiti, DJing, and MCing, or rapping.
3. It is difficult to say whether globally the appropriation of hip-hop nation language receives the same critiques as white appropriation in the U.S. It would be a fruitful area of research to explore how global hip-hoppers' use of AAE is received by members of the U.S. hip-hop community.
4. This is not to discount the presence of black industry moguls like Sean Combs and Russell Simmons, but the success of these individuals is far outweighed by whites who profit from hip-hop's ever-growing popularity.
5. It is important not to ignore that Eminem's lyrics are profoundly misogynistic, homophobic, and violent (Cobb and Boettcher 2007; Stephens 2005). While we cannot address this here, we must call attention to the fact that his music is problematic in these ways.
6. Interviews are from radio shows that regularly feature hip-hop stars: the Angie Martinez show, the Hot 97 Morning Show, and The Breakfast Club on Power 105.1.
7. The point is actually somewhat irrelevant for the current data, as we know that Iggy Azalea is a non-native user of AAE.
8. These albums included *Amazin'* (2010), *Still Da Baddest* (2008), and *Glamorest Life* (2005) for Trina, and *The Marshall Mathers LP 2* (2013), *Recovery* (2010) and *Relapse* (2009) for Eminem.
9. Speech data for Trina comes from an interview with The Breakfast Club, and from Rap City for Eminem.
10. Many mainstream African American rappers have also been criticized for this same enactment and perpetuation of stereotypes of African Americans, which hip-hop has come to be associated with (see e.g. Rose 1994).
11. This is further underscored by Iggy's modeling career: http://www.wilhelmina.com/portfolio.aspx?c=ny&modelid=590377&subid=10226&mainsubid=10226&sexid=2&spec=0. One may question whether Iggy is also playing on stereotypes about black men preferring white women, or whether

she sees her beauty as superior to that of African American women. Such questions call up discourses and politics surrounding relationships between white women and African American men, such as are enacted in the 'war council' scene of Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*, and powerfully articulated in Cassandra Lane's essay *Skinned* (2003). This is a theme that Lopez (2014) additionally takes up in her analysis of white female film characters performing hip-hop identities.

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