Lyrics and Luxury: Exploring the UK African Diaspora's Cultural Currency through UK Rap

By

Tīrī Murai

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

University for the Creative Arts
Business School for the Creative Industries

October 2024

Declaration of Authorship

I, WATĪRĪ MURAI

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Lyrics and Luxury: Exploring the UK African Diaspora's Cultural Currency Through UK Rap

I confirm that:

This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at the University for the Creative Arts

Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations and citations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed: Watīrī Murai

Date: 28th July 2025

ABSTRACT

Lyrics and luxury: Exploring the United Kingdom African diaspora cultural currency through Rap

By Watīrī Murai

This thesis examines the interplay between United Kingdom (UK) rap music and luxury fashion brands, focusing on the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora. UK rap represents the cultural wealth generated by contemporary Black Britain. My research investigates luxury brand mentions in UK rap lyrics, how luxury-related lyrics amplify forms of community cultural wealth and lived experiences and how brand mentions magnify Black masculine and feminine constructs.

What distinguishes the UK's rap intersection with luxury brands from the long-established relationship between US rap and the luxury fashion world? My research uncovers this difference and illuminates unique aspects of UK rap, such as its distinct allegiance to the tracksuit. As a chosen methodology, I combined content analysis of UK rap song lyrics with in-depth and semi-structured interviews with key industry professionals. My findings revealed how personal relationships between UK rap artists and luxury brand creative directors have played a role in integrating UK rap into the luxury fashion sphere. My research reveals that luxury brand lyrical mentions are not solely intended for product or brand placement, but rather serve to enhance aspirational expressions. These lyrical expressions encompass a blend of elements: achieving success, gender, sexual connotations, working-class experiences, and fashion identities. However, it is important to acknowledge that these mentions also serve commercial motives. Despite this, UK rap is founded on authenticity and assuredness of heritage, keeping a constant ear to the streets, resulting in relatability. The role of the fashion stylist has proven to be relevant in the said interplay, which I establish as a cultural intermediary that draws on UK rap artists' identities to convey realness. The authenticity embedded in UK rap appeals to luxury brands. However, are UK rap artists the beneficiaries of the UK rap and luxury brand interrelationship? My thesis advocates for Black ownership within the luxury fashion space as a decolonial method to effectively preserve Afro-diasporic cultural currencies. UK rap demonstrates the cultural influence that luxury brands must associate with to access demographics that follow UK rap culture. Despite their marginalised backgrounds, UK rap artists provide brands with immense cultural relevance and coolness, specifically within the Generation Z groups. UK rappers are representations of aspirations being attainable for working-class youth by virtue of their success, as seen through their associations with the luxury fashion world. They are Afro-diasporic protagonists, the voices of the minoritised.

Key words:

UK rap, Luxury fashion brands, UK African diaspora, Decolonisation, Cultural wealth, Cultural currency

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP 3
ABSTRACT 4
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION **10**
1.1 INTRODUCTION 10
1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND 13
1.3 RAP MUSIC AS AN AFRICAN DIASPORIC CULTURAL CURRENCY 14
1.4 GUIDE TO THIS RESEARCH 15
1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS 18
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW PART ONE **20**
2.1 INTRODUCTION 20
2.2 HIP HOP STUDIES: US, GLOBAL AND UK CONTEXTS 21
2.2.1 GLOBAL HIP HOP 26
2.2.2 UK RAP 29
2.3 DIASPORA STUDIES 33
2.3.1 PAN-AFRICAN THOUGHT AND THE SOUNDTRACKS OF THE DIASPORA 38
2.4 RAP MUSIC AND LUXURY 43
2.4.1 RAP MUSIC AND LUXURY BRANDS 48
2.4.2 LUXURY FASHION: STATUS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY 52
2.5 LIBERALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM 53
CONCLUSION: 58
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW PART TWO **59**
3.1 INTRODUCTION 59
3.2 EXPLORING UK RAP THROUGH COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH 60
3.3 LYRICS, SYMBOLS AND CULTURAL VALUE 68
3.4 BLACK GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF RAP 71
3.5 UK RAP FASHION IDENTITY AND SUBCULTURAL FACETS 74
3.6 THE FASHION STYLIST 78
3.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK 81
CONCLUSION 88
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY **89**
4.1 INTRODUCTION 89
4.2 FUELLING BLACK EPISTEMOLOGY: A CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH 90
4.2.1 PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONING: JUSTIFICATION FOR A CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM 91
4.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: WHAT RAPPERS, INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS, AND WHY 93
4.4 CONSTRUCTIVISM AS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: A SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW METHOD 100

4.5 Content analysis: What lyrics and why 103
4.6 Research method restrictions and considerations 108
4.7 Ethical considerations and factors 109
Conclusion 111

CHAPTER FIVE: "WE DON'T FUCK WITH RANDOM BRANDS." 112

5.1 Introduction 112
5.3 "It went from that to the extreme opposite." 119
5.4 "But now we're in the shows" 122
5.5 "When I'm wearing tracksuits ... they'll move towards me" 126
5.6 Gendered realities and the stylist's role in UK Rap 129
5.7 "You can say thanks to people like Virgil Abloh, rest in peace, for doing things like that" 135
5.8 "The UK culture don't really like people flexing on them" 139
Conclusion 142

CHAPTER SIX: LYRICS, LUXURY AND CURRENCY 143

6.1 Introduction 143
6.2 Lyrics and luxury: brand mentions and contexts 145
6.3 UK Rap Lyrics as Sites of Community Cultural Wealth and Cultural Currency 159
6.4 Heritage Narratives in UK Rap 167
6.5 Lyrical expressions of double consciousness and hybridity 172
6.6 UK rap lyrics as sites of Decolonisation 176
Conclusion 180

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SKEPTA CASE STUDY 181

7.1 Introduction 181
7.2 "Yeah, I used to wear Gucci; put it all in the bin 'cause that's not me" 182
7.3 From Outsider to Insider 187
7.4 Owning the narrative: Calls for Black ownership 190
7.5 Behind the look: the stylist, UK rap, and luxury fashion in the case of Skepta 194
7.6 Navigating neoliberalism: The case of Skepta 199
Conclusion 201

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION 202

8.1 Introduction 202
8.2 Research question one: How far do UK rap artists and related industry professionals perceive the cultural influence that Black UK rappers may have on rap audiences through lyrical brand mentions and fashion identity? 203
8.3 Research question two: What is the role of the stylist in the UK rap and fashion relationship? 206

8.4 Research question three: Are all UK rap lyrical mentions of luxury brand names forms of product and brand placement? 208
8.5 Key original contributions to knowledge: The UK African diaspora's cultural currency within the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay 210
8.6 Limitations and recommendations for future research 212
8.7 Implications of the research: Theory, practice and policy 214
8.8 Final reflection and closing remarks 216

BIBLIOGRAPHY 218

APPENDICES 292

Appendix 1: Transcript of Interview with Lash 292
Appendix 1.2: Transcript of Interview with Shaybo 313
Appendix 2: Transcript of Interview with Grace Ladoja 327
Appendix 3: Transcript of Interview with Nicole Vernon 360
Appendix 3.1: Transcript of Interview with Ibrahim Kamara 380
Appendix 4: Final sample of songs 392

Figure 1: Image of Ibrahim Kamara (Linkedin, Nd) 94
Figure 2: Image of Shaybo (Genius, Nd) 95
Figure 3: Image of Nicole Vernon (Everand, 2024) 96
Figure 4: Image of Grace Ladoja (Metallic Inc, Nd) 97
Figure 5: Image of Lash (Instagram, 2024) 98
Figure 6: Image of Skepta (The Guardian, 2022) 99
Figure 7: Pie chart of luxury brands mentioned in the final sample of UK rap songs 146
Figure 8: Pie chart representing the black gendered connotations in the final sample 156
Figure 9: Pie chart representing the lyrical assertions of community cultural wealth forms in the final sample 166
Figure 10: Pie chart representing the lyrical mentions of heritage in the final sample 171
Figure 11: Pie chart representing lyrical mentions or suggestions of decolonisation in the final sample 179

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank GOD for everything. He gave me the strength, intuition, and guidance I needed when it got so hard. He has been my comfort and source of vigour. This PhD journey was a spiritual experience, and I am so grateful for His grace, mercy, and blessings. All glory and honour goes to The Most High, my Lord and Saviour. Thank you GOD!

This research was fully funded by the University for the Creative Arts. My Vice Chancellor's PhD Studentship allowed me to focus on what has given me a more profound sense of purpose. I want to thank all my supervisors for their time over the last three years. To my director of studies, Dr Julie Blanchard-Emmerson, thank you so much for your invaluable advice, and uplifting support, and for helping me grow. I want to thank my second supervisor, Dr Nadya Ostroff, for giving me encouragement and insights and inviting me to be on my first-ever conference panel. Thank you to my third supervisor, Professor Birgitta Hosea, for your incredible support, check-ins, encouragement, and insights. Thank you so much, Nick Hillman, for your invaluable time and for extending yourself, your support, and your fantastic book recommendations. Thank you to Dr Jessica Kelley, who believed in me from the start and took an interest in my work.

Special recognition and thanks go to Shaybo, Ibrahim Kamara, Grace Ladoja MBE, Nicole Vernon, Lash and STEELO, for their time and contributions. I am so grateful. I am also thankful for the inspiration gained from the UK rappers I used in my lyrical content analysis and to Skepta, who is a case study within this thesis.

Lastly, I owe everything to my loved ones for their lifelong support and interest in my research and for always encouraging me when I needed it the most. I love you all so much.

This thesis is dedicated to Cūcū. May you continue to Rest in Peace.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The transition during my upbringing in Kenya went from being in awe of white Disney princesses and Barbies to daydreaming about wearing luxurious clothes and jewellery from head to toe, while bopping my head to Snoop Dogg, Jay Z, Lil Wayne, and 50 Cent. That shift was the effect of the potency of rap music on the young Black mind. Rap music decolonised my mind and moulded some of my aspirations. At its core, rap is an Afro-centric art form of empowerment (Asante, 2008). Rather than coming home after school to watch Hannah Montana, I would rush to my bedroom and play rap music on my radio. Whiteness quickly stopped being absorbed by my young, adolescent, impressionable mind. Burning CDs with rap songs, listening to them on my Walkman all day on the weekends, and eventually graduating to an iPod and cell phone as I got older helped me stay in the know about luxury brands that felt so farfetched; an effect of the arguably materialistic ethos present in US rap music and its cross-cultural appeal (Rose, 1994; Krims, 2000; Kitwana, 2005; Dyson, 2007; Rose, 2008). I would listen to certain songs that would make me feel like I owned the Gucci that was name-dropped when I did not have a shilling to my name; an effect I propose was only possible because Black rappers inadvertently made me feel I could attain what seemed so enthralling. I now identify this feeling as an impact of cross-regional resonance: seeing Black people from another region thrive and succeed in a way that resonated with me. Beyond the cross-regional resonance, there exists a profound connection to rap music among Black individuals globally, which I consider to be intricately linked to the African cultural system (Asante, 1986). Rap music is an African musical expression rooted in ancestral heritage, encompassing a diverse range of art forms and historical periods (Amatokwu, 2009). The art of rap has been founded in and traversed multiple artistic traditions and creative practices, including jeli, commonly referred to as griot,[1] spirituals, blues, jazz, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, gospel, soul music, reggae, dub poetry and toasting traditions, dancehall, soca, calypso, hip-hop, UK garage (Hebdige, 1987; Gilroy, 1987; Craddock-Willis, 1989; Rose, 1994; Mitchell, 2001; Chang, 2005; Amatokwu, 2009; Fatsis, 2018; Roberts, 2022), grime and UK rap (Bramwell, 2011; 2015).

[1] The West African Griot is a traditional storyteller, historian, praise singer, and musician who plays a crucial role in the cultural and social dynamics of West African societies. Griots are frequently regarded as custodians of oral history, tasked with preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge (Finnegan, 1970; Hale, 1998; Amatokwu, 2009).

I began to listen to UK rap music when I relocated to London in 2014 to pursue my education. I observed that UK rap was significantly less flashy than US rap; it espoused a more pragmatic perspective. The context in which UK rappers such as Skepta and Jme mentioned luxury brands diminished the 'superficiality' entrenched in my initial perceptions of rap music. I found Skepta's (2014) *That's Not Me* (2014) song featuring Jme particularly distinctive. It was both invigorating and peculiar to hear a rapper boldly reject a luxury brand and emphasise the vigour of his own identity. His lyrics challenged the principles of lyrical product and brand placement (Metcalfe and Ruth, 2020; Farwell *et al*., 2023) and the agendas of neoliberalism and capitalism concerning rap music (Rose, 1994, p.102; Spence, 2011, pp.19–54) demonstrating a form of resistance and oppositional behaviour that intrigued me. '*That's Not Me'* (2014) later informed the period studied in this thesis: 2014 to 2024. I was curious to see how the indifference to luxury brands seen in Skepta's earlier lyrics has transformed over a decade, as well as other UK rap artists, and understand the journey to what the UK rap and luxury fashion brand intersection is today.

UK rap was refreshing and down-to-earth, coupled with the essence of Caribbean and African heritage that lingers in the London air. It has been a remedy for my homesickness over the last ten years and has deepened my appreciation for Pan-Africanist ideologies (Garvey, 1923; Fanon, 1954, 1961; Nkrumah, 1963; Diop, 1974, 1987; Asante, 1988). Black people are one, whether from the African diaspora or the continent (Nwosu, 2019), operating with the African cultural system (Asante, 1988) at their core. Codrington (2006) highlights how Black British identity and culture are the presence and result of collective African and Caribbean heritage and cultures. Therefore, throughout this thesis, the UK African diaspora refers to people of African and Caribbean heritage (Gilroy, 1995) who are either born and/or raised in Britain. UK rappers' strong awareness and pride in cultural identity illustrates how UK rap is a cultural currency peppered with Caribbean and African influences (Codrington, 2006) that are forms of decolonisation. This cultural currency is also infused with the intricate fusion of poignancy and exuberance of being Black and British that reverberates Du Bois' (1903) theory of double consciousness and Gilroy's (1993) interpretation of this concept.

My research defines UK rap as a contemporary UK African diasporan cultural expression, serving as an art form of linguistic (Bramwell, 2011, p. 10) capital that reflects lived experiences. It embodies aspirational, resistant, navigational and familial capital (Yosso, 2005), effectively conveying various events and conditions. UK rap draws attention to the first or second generation of the present-day UK African diaspora and who they can be. This thesis posits that UK rap functions as a form of social commentary (Bramwell, 2011, p. 286), characterised by encoded lyrical messages that critically reflect

contemporary Black Britain's complexities. When I refer to UK rap, it encompasses UK hip-hop, grime, drill and afro-swing; irrespective of the beat, it is Black and British and embodies rhythmic storytelling in the form of rap.

As I interrogate the apparent but convoluted interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, I consider how the luxury fashion sector benefits from the UK African diaspora's cultural currency. However, I intend for this thesis to be holistic, focusing on the identity of Black UK rappers from working-class backgrounds and how they exert decolonisation through their music, authenticity and connectedness to heritage. Who are they? What do they say in their lyrics? How have those elements and forms of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) solidified the interrelationship between UK rap and luxury brands today? Do these elements deepen the cultural influence that UK rappers may have on their audiences, especially concerning lyrical luxury brand mentions, irrespective of the context in which they are mentioned?

An article by the fashion publication *Hypebeast* indicates how UK rap and fashion have become part of one another's identity. This intersection will propound a new era of grime music and the genre's descendants (Hypebeast, 2022). Yet very few sources within academia explore UK rap music and its relationship with luxury fashion brands. Academics have focussed primarily on US rap and hip-hop's relationship with luxury fashion brands (Forman, 2002; Kawamura, 2005; Miller, 2009; Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012; Podoshen *et al*., 2014). UK rap is influenced by US rap (Codrington, 2006); however, to equate the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay with that of US rap would not only be negligent of how the genres differ as well as their fashion identities but would also be ignorant to the cultural differences and influences in UK rap. This thesis, therefore, makes an original contribution to the investigation of UK rap's relationship with luxury fashion brands and foregrounds the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora within this context. Current scholarly discourse lacks the inclusion of contemporary Black British viewpoints on the relationship between UK rap music and luxury fashion brands. During the preliminary stages of my investigation, I could only identify journalistic sites that provided current information and viewpoints. These voices must be acknowledged within the academic sphere to fuel Black epistemology.

1.2 Research background

I started to recognise my enthusiasm for the academic field during my undergraduate studies. Before that point, while in Kenya, I believed that the realms of academia and creative industries were mutually exclusive. During my Bachelor of Arts in Fashion Styling (2015-2018), followed by my Master of Arts in Fashion Communication, Media, and Promotion (2019-2020), I developed a strong inclination towards imagery and visuals that articulated themes of Black cultural power and wealth, drawing from both archival materials and contemporary sources. The influence of these images significantly shaped my self-perception as a fashion practitioner, particularly within the styling domain. I came to believe that if they influenced and impacted my styling projects, the imagery would effectively communicate with its consumers or target audiences. The presence of a luxury fashion campaign featuring a Black individual or personality would evoke a profound sense of belonging for me as a Black immigrant in the UK. This experience would subsequently motivate me to integrate themes of Black identity alongside messages reflecting Black culture and pertinent issues into the conceptualisation of the shoots I would creative direct and style, particularly throughout my undergraduate studies.

It was during my MA program, while I was assisting Nicole Vernon in styling Skepta for a music video shoot, that I realised the intersection of UK rap and luxury fashion was much more than just aspirational. As an assistant stylist, my responsibilities encompassed visiting public relations agencies to procure garments from high-end brands, making purchases at Selfridges, and sourcing designers whose collections aligned with the music video's thematic requirements and 'vibe'. It was evident that the said interconnection was a relationship characterised by mutual interdependence between the two sectors. During the styling process, Skepta enquired about the possibility of incorporating a Prada brooch onto his shirt, simultaneously engaging in a collaborative discussion with those in the dressing room. It was apparent that while the stylists were responsible for sourcing the clothing, he independently made the final decision regarding his look. This prompted a critical examination of the stylist's function at the intersection of UK rap and luxury fashion, comprising one of my research questions.

The multifaceted aspects of my experience assisting Vernon instigated my curiosity, prompting me to seek scholarly literature that could elucidate the phenomena I observed. To my surprise, there was a significant lack of research addressing the interrelationship of UK rap and luxury fashion. As mentioned earlier, in contrast, academic work discusses the relationship between US rap, hip-hop, and luxury

fashion (Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012; Burns, 2016; Den and Behrer, 2016; Lezama, 2019; Bug, 2019). Investigations into UK rap and associated garments, such as the tracksuit (Amin, 2019; Parker, 2022), have been conducted; however, the multifaceted relationship between UK rap and fashion, as evidenced in lyrics, social media, and journalistic sources, warrants further exploration within academic discourse. In reflecting on my motivations for pursuing a doctorate centred on UK rap and luxury fashion brands with a focus on the UK African diaspora and its cultural wealth, I was clear that my intention for this study is to foster a sense of belonging for Black youth within the academic sphere; to enable them to recognise their own identities, while simultaneously enriching the diversity and representation of Black perspectives and epistemology in scholarly discourse. Additionally, as a Pan-Africanist, I want to exemplify facets of decolonisation within this research.

1.3 Rap music as an African diasporic cultural currency

This work does not provide an extensive overview of rap studies.[2] However, I discuss the critical debates regarding scholarly work that has been done on UK rap, rap music and luxury fashion brands' interconnection, as well as other key themes of my work in the literature review. I deem it necessary to present an overview of rap music as a diasporic cultural currency since that is fundamentally what I am exploring. The definition of currency, according to the *Collins Dictionary*, in the context of an uncountable noun, is when many people use or accept a custom or idea, with the synonyms listed as circulation, popularity, acceptance, prevalence and exposure. Rap music is a circulated, popular and prevalent art form.

We have America to thank for the globalisation (Mitchell, 2001) and the cultivation of rap music in the modern world. Still, as a linguistic art form (Bramwell, 2011, p. 10), rap transcends national boundaries, serving as a medium for communication among and within various Black communities (Gilroy, 1993). However, Black American scholars claim this diasporic cultural form in an emphatically nationalist way (Gilroy, 1993, pp. 33-34). We cannot wholly credit the Bronx for the origins of rap music, given its acknowledged influences from Jamaican sound system culture (ibid.) and earlier roots in West African griot traditions (Amatokwu, 2009; Bramwell, 2011), as discussed earlier.

[2] For extensive work on hip-hop and rap music, see Rose (1994), Krims (2000), Forman (2002), Chang (2005), Dyson (2007), Bramwell (2011;2015), and Forman and Neal (2012).

Rap music is a phenomenon (Fonseca, 2019), serving as a global sensation that compellingly engages audiences and holds a revered place in the contemporary world (Mitchell, 2001). It dominates popular culture (Rose, 1994, pp. 2-5; Chang, 2005, pp. 3-7; Kitwana, 2005, pp. 9-14; 43-46). Rap serves as a significant mode of expressing aspirations (Facchinetti, 2010; Hadley, 2012) and cultural resistance for Black youth, especially within urban environments where they encounter systemic racism and economic disenfranchisement (Rose, 1994, pp. 99-100). Rap music is a voice for these communities, functioning as a conduit for social and political expression (ibid.). Yet, ironically, so to speak, the rap music industry carries immense cultural and economic dominance (Krims, 2000, p. 1) and has strong political and cultural effects (Krims, 2000; Kitwana, 2005). Despite globalisation, rap music withholds its core elements of resistance and identity (Chang, 2005). Irrespective of the renditions and reforms of rap music, it stands as a cultural currency of the marginalised at its core. For instance, with grime, Bramwell's (2011, p. 12) study underlines a forum user stating that grime music is the "underground sounds of broken Britain", highlighting its role as a medium of expression that generates bases of knowledge regarding social conditions, collective interpretations of those conditions, and functions as the cultural binding that promotes communal resilience (Rose, 1994, p.100).

I suspect the cultural currency of rap music resides in the hidden transcripts that Scott (1990) discusses, to which Rose (1994) concurs. The currency I refer to serves as a haven in which Black linguistic capital shields speech and disguises cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects, demonstrating symbolic and cerebral warfare with individuals and institutions that ideologically, materially, and symbolically oppress Black people. In the context of my research, it is in these hidden transcripts that we may argue that establishments such as luxury fashion brands profit from rap. White-owned, elite luxury brands fall under the public transcripts that Scott (1990) identifies as those who dominate within the 'social order'. The incorporation of luxury brand names into rap songs "draw portraits of contact with dominant groups in which the hidden transcript inverts/subverts the public dominant transcript" (Rose, 1994, p. 101). Rap as a currency provides a safe refuge for hidden transcripts. Yet dominant groups, through luxury brands, are lyrically interwoven, symbolised, and circulated, and in many cases benefit from how they are positioned within Black linguistic capital, whether purposefully or inadvertently.

1.4 Guide to this research

This thesis critically appropriates Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model by integrating Pan-Africanist ideologies (Asante, 1988) and employs a constructivist research approach. Identity

constitutes the overarching component of this thesis, as seen in the extensive body of academic literature on rap music (Gilroy, 1987; Gilroy, 1993; Rose, 1994; Krims, 2000; Forman, 2002; Perry, 2005; Chang, 2005; Morgan, 2009; Bramwell, 2011; Bramwell, 2015). This study examines the amplification of identities among UK rap artists through six forms of cultural wealth, the construction of these identities, and their interactions with luxury brands, as articulated in their lyrics. This study examines the determinants of identity: race, class and Black-gendered constructs, to an extent parallel to the work of Bramwell (2011) in his analysis of social performatives in the construction of race-based and gendered subjectivities within the Black community in London. Additionally, my work investigates ethnic heritage expressed in UK rap lyrics, which may be amplified by luxury brand mentions, thus questioning whether all lyrical brand mentions are forms of product/brand placement.

The research questions, aims, and objectives have been investigated with a qualitative research design. Utilising semi-structured interviews and content analysis of lyrics, the investigation seeks to enhance contemporary perspectives by identifying a case study and engaging with pertinent Black industry professionals who have directly observed, experienced, intermediated, and lived out the development of the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion. As I have asserted earlier, we cannot reduce Afro-diasporic art forms to be monolithic despite their embedding within a shared Afrocentric system (Asante, 1988) and embodiment of analogous forms of cultural wealth. Still, they demonstrate unique manifestations in lyrical contexts, as well as through fashion identity and inimitable style narratives (Tulloch, 2012), attributable to variations in subcultural identity and cultural and/or environmental factors. Thus, an analysis of an extensive selection of UK rap songs released between 2014 and 2024 illuminates the facets of six cultural wealth forms and the contexts surrounding the mentions of luxury brand names. The content analysis, as well as the integration of perspectives and observations from my research participants (who are named in Chapter Four), elucidates the 'nature' of UK rap's association with luxury brands, as well as the broader context of UK rap culture and identity, highlighting its foundational characteristics that can, in certain instances, serve as mechanisms of decolonisation.

This research had the potential to investigate a multitude of pathways concerning UK rap, luxury fashion brands, and the cultural currency associated with the UK African diaspora. The principal objective of this inquiry is to strengthen ideas within the sociological and cultural contexts of fashion and rap music. To this end, three research questions have been formulated for in-depth investigation, alongside the identification of three aims and objectives that will serve as the anticipated outcomes of this thesis:

Research questions

How far do UK rap artists and related industry professionals perceive the cultural influence that Black UK rappers may have on rap audiences through lyrical brand mentions and fashion identity?

What is the role of the stylist in the UK Rap and fashion relationship?

Are all lyrical mentions of luxury brand names forms of product and brand placement?

Aims

To examine the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay and highlight how UK rap is a Black British cultural currency from which the luxury fashion sector benefits.

To contribute knowledge regarding the UK African diaspora's cultural wealth through UK rap

To emphasise examples of decolonisation through UK rap as a Black cultural resource, grounded in pride in heritage.

Objectives

To establish a case study of Skepta's association with luxury fashion brands, and obtain a female UK rap standpoint from Shaybo through semi-structured interviews and lyrics.

To conduct content analysis on lyrics featuring luxury brand names and investigate the contexts of luxury brand mentions and underpin assertions of ethnic heritage.

To explore how a UK rap artist's identity and authenticity coincide with luxury brand associations.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organised into eight chapters, each building on the last to advance the argument that UK rap operates as a cultural currency within the contemporary UK African diaspora's relationship with luxury fashion.

Chapter Two opens the first part of the literature review by situating the study within hip hop scholarship across US, global and UK contexts. It then examines diaspora studies and Afro-diasporic music through a Pan-African lens before turning to rap and luxury, interrogating pre-colonial relationships between Black people and fashion, and tracing how these histories shape contemporary interactions with luxury brands. The chapter turns to a discussion of luxury fashion, status, and social mobility, followed by an examination of liberalism and neoliberalism in relation to this research.

Chapter Three continues the literature review, beginning with a discussion on interpreting UK rap as a cultural currency through Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework, which underpins this thesis. The chapter continues to examine lyrics, symbols and cultural value. It then examines gendered perspectives within rap, explores fashion identity and subcultural facets, considers the role of the stylist, and concludes the chapter with a dedicated section setting out the conceptual framework for this thesis.

Chapter Four outlines the methodological approach, detailing the constructivist paradigm guiding the research, the qualitative methods used, and the analytical processes adopted for interviews and lyric analysis. Chapter Five presents the first empirical findings from interviews, analysing issues concerning product placement, the early stages of UK rap's relationship with luxury brands, the relevance of Fashion Week and club culture, the enduring significance of the tracksuit, gendered realities and the role of the stylist, and the role of social capital within the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the distinctions between UK and US rap's engagement with luxury fashion.

Chapter Six turns to lyrical analysis, examining how luxury brands appear in lyrics, how Community Cultural Wealth is articulated, and how affirmations of heritage, double consciousness and decolonial ideas are woven through UK rap narratives. Chapter Seven offers a case study of Skepta, charting his evolution from outsider to cultural influencer within luxury fashion. It examines Black ownership and influence, the role of the stylist in his image-making, and his navigation of neoliberal pressures. The

final chapter synthesises the study's findings, reflecting on how UK rap reshapes notions of inclusion, influence and cultural value in luxury fashion, and outlining the contributions, limitations and implications of this research.

Chapter Two: Literature review Part One

2.1 Introduction

Chapter Two initiates the literature review by situating this research within the evolving field of hip-hop studies across the US, global and UK contexts. Hip-hop has long been theorised as both an aesthetic movement and a politicised cultural archive, emerging from sites of marginalisation as a form of resistance, storytelling, and community-making. Placing UK rap within this lineage highlights how the genre extends and reinterprets hip hop's diasporic roots while producing its own distinct articulations of identity, style, and critique.

From there, the chapter moves into diaspora studies, framing UK rap as a vital expression of Afro-diasporic identity and Pan-African solidarity. Drawing on Pan-Africanist thinkers, it considers how rap becomes a response to colonial histories, migration, and racialised dislocation, while also serving as a vehicle for reclaiming cultural narratives. This framing affirms that UK rap's meanings cannot be divorced from the wider struggles and creativity of the African diaspora, whose cultural DNA underpins the genre's sonic, lyrical and stylistic innovations.

The chapter then interrogates the relationship between rap and luxury fashion, moving beyond portrayals of luxury consumption in hip hop as merely aspirational or superficial. It examines pre-colonial relationships between Black people and luxury, questioning how long-standing Afro-diasporic practices of self-styling and sartorial expression inform present-day engagements with luxury brands.

The chapter then discusses luxury fashion in relation to status and social mobility. Finally, the discussion turns to the ideological frameworks of liberalism and neoliberalism that shape how UK rap and luxury fashion are perceived and circulated. These ideologies, which prioritise individualism, visibility and market assimilation, risk reducing Black cultural currency to something that can be merely commodified, while masking the collective and resistant forces that drive UK rap.

2.2 Hip hop studies: US, global and UK contexts

The current scope of hip hop studies boasts an intricate interdisciplinary field that connects and deciphers hip hop and rap culture through varied lenses such as race studies (Rose, 1994; hooks, 1994; Kelley, 1997; Dent, 1998; Chang, 2005; Quinn, 2005) musicology (Krims, 2000; Forman and Neal, 2004; Schloss, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Adams, 2009; Edwards, 2013), cultural studies (Potter, 1995; Kelley, 1997; Krims, 2000; Mitchell, 2001; Neal, 2002; Chang, 2005; Condry, 2006; Blackman, 2019), sociology (Rose, 1994; Kelley, 1997; Chang, 2005) and media studies (Rose, 1994; Krims, 2000; Mitchell, 2001). My thesis focuses on the cultural and sociological aspects of UK rap music, with a strong emphasis on the Afro-diasporic elements, underlining UK rap as more than a music genre or 'branch' of hip hop, but a cultural currency that encompasses the potency of (black) aspirational, social, navigational, resistant, familial and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). The African diaspora youth are the sole generators of hip hop and rap music (Kitwana, 2002; Chang, 2005), regardless of the now widespread global iterations.

Beyond a mere music genre, hip-hop is a cultural movement that embodies four foundational elements: MCing (rapping), DJing, breakdancing (b-boying), and graffiti art. Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation formalised these elements in the 1970s, highlighting how hip-hop functioned as a comprehensive youth cultural system (Chang, 2005; Forman and Neal, 2004). MCing refers to the rhythmic vocal delivery of lyrics over beats, often rooted in improvisation and storytelling (Keyes, 2002, pp. 1–2, 54–56). DJing, popularised by pioneers like Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash, entails the manipulation of vinyl records to create breakbeats and new sonic textures (Schloss, 2004). Graffiti art serves as a visual assertion of territorial presence and identity, while breakdancing is a kinetic and physical articulation of resistance, style, and bodily autonomy (Keyes, 2002). These four elements collectively represent the multifaceted expression of Black youth culture responding to urban neglect. Though the four elements of hip hop are equally important when dissecting hip-hop, this thesis focuses on UK rap as a form of Black linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Therefore, rap music as an element will be the focal point of this work. Krims (2000) defines rap music as a complex lyrical artform with unique flows, rhymes, schemes and rhythmic structures that shape identity. The lasting power and effect of rap lyrics surpass one-dimensional rhythmic configurations, serving as a dynamical vessel for storytelling, social critique, and cultural preservation. Lyrically, rap music functions as a space for political and cultural critique. Perry (2004) argues that rap should be viewed as a form of poetry and rhetorical expression steeped in African diasporic oral tradition. Perry highlights the deliberate linguistic play, intertextuality, and narrative density of rap as evidence of its intellectual rigor. This

connects with Keyes (2002), who characterises rap as a continuation of the griotic tradition; African oral storytelling brought forward through contemporary cultural production. The concept of the rapper as modern-day griot is a recurring motif in hip-hop studies and links Black musical tradition with resistance and continuity.

In more recent scholarship, rap is often framed as a site of contradiction; simultaneously countercultural and deeply commercialised. Neal (2013) discusses this tension through the lens of "post-soul aesthetics," exploring how hip-hop artists navigate commercial success and racial authenticity. Similarly, Rose (2008) critiques how the commodification of hip-hop has transformed it into a cultural product that is both a vehicle of resistance and an instrument of capitalist co-optation. These dualities, she suggests, are central to understanding hip-hop's political ambivalence in the 21st century. Within the intersection of rap and luxury brands, Afro-diasporic cultural influence is commodified and exploited through strategic partnerships, which, arguably, is only beneficial for the brands (Banet-Weiser, 2012). The rap and luxury brand relationship can also be included as one of the post-soul aesthetics that Neal (2013) discusses, particularly through the use of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). The interrelationship between rap and luxury brands introduces a new dimension of political incongruity within hip-hop, opening up novel avenues for critical inquiry and expanding the epistemological scope of hip-hop studies.

Hip-hop studies as an academic field has grown significantly over the past three decades. This field began with foundational works in U.S. scholarship that pin-pointed hip-hop as a product of the socio-political and economic conditions of post-industrial urban America. Rose's Black Noise (1994) established a blueprint for understanding hip-hop as a form of Black cultural expression rooted in resistance to systemic inequality. She framed rap not as cultural detritus, but as a powerful cultural form responding to urban decay, state abandonment, and surveillance in cities like the Bronx, which, is a recurring theme in the history of black music stemming from the transatlantic slave trade. Rose's later work (The Hip-Hop Wars, 2008) deepens this analysis by exploring the ideological conflicts surrounding hip-hop's commercialisation, misogyny, and racial representation. These foundational works underscore that hip-hop is not merely musical, but sociological and political in its ethos. My thesis partially draws on Rose's interpretations of hip hop, but aims to underline the unique sociological and cultural elements of UK rap music, and how those aspects entwine when UK rap intersects with luxury brands, whether through industry connections or lyrics.

When discussing hip hop studies, US hip hop is at the forefront, due to hip hop's roots being in New York (Chang, 2005). This centrality of U.S. hip hop in the field is both historical and discursive; New York City in the 1970s provided the socio-economic and cultural conditions for the birth of hip hop as a response to racialised poverty, urban disinvestment, and systemic neglect (Rose, 1994; Chang, 2005). As such, the U.S. remains the dominant geographical and theoretical focus within early hip-hop scholarship, shaping the foundational frameworks through which hip-hop is often analysed globally. My study seeks to contribute to knowledge by proposing alternative frameworks for analysing rap music, particularly UK rap, moving beyond the dominant assumption that rap is a monolithically American cultural form. However, exploring the development of hip hop in the US context is crucial to understanding its evolution as both a cultural movement and a global language of resistance. As the field of hip-hop scholarly work matured, scholars such as Forman (2002) and Krims (2000) moved towards more nuanced analyses of hip-hop's spatial and sonic geographies. Forman (2002) explores how hip-hop articulates urban space, arguing that "the 'hood" is not just a physical location but a symbolic geography embedded in the sonic and lyrical textures of rap. Krims (2000). Meanwhile, it offers a musicological typology of rap flows and beats, showing how these forms encode class, gender, and regional identity. Both Krims (2000) and Forman (2002) anchor hip-hop within both the sonic and the spatial logics of late capitalism3, helping deconstruct the genre's evolving political implications.

Following Rose (1994), scholars like Kelley (1997) emphasised the genre's classed and racialised dimensions, framing hip-hop as a continuation of Black working-class resistance culture. Kelley argues that hip-hop, especially in its early forms, represented a rejection of dominant social norms and acted as a space for cultural critique and community building. The same goes for UK rap, which is discussed in depth later in this section; however, rather than UK rap only rejecting dominant social norms, it also rejects the indoctrination of the black mind though its strong links with ancestral heritage (Codrington, 2006) and cultural negotiations, echoing the everyday lives and ways of being among black British youth. Kelley's (1997) focus on the everyday lives of Black youth places hip-hop firmly within the terrain of labour, inequality, and resistance; important bases for understanding how rap functions as both a cultural product and a form of social commentary.

[3] Forman (2002) links the spatial production of rap to urban geographies marked by race and inequality, while Krims (2000) situates rap's formal elements—such as flow and rhythm—within the broader structures of late capitalism, arguing that sonic form reflects and responds to socio-economic conditions.

From a US cultural studies perspective, Potter's Spectacular Vernaculars (1995) situates hip-hop within postmodernism and theorises the way rappers use inter-textuality, parody, and pastiche to disrupt mainstream cultural production. Similarly, Neal (2002; 2013) foregrounds hip-hop's relationship to Black intellectualism, articulating how hip-hop culture generates new modes of knowledge production and Black public discourse. Neal's work, particularly in Soul Babies (2002) and Looking for Leroy: Illegible black masculinities (2013), offers insights into the politics of visibility and respectability as negotiated by hip-hop artists. In the context of my research, this thesis argues that the interrelationship with luxury brands and rap artists can not only propel the visibility and respectability that Neal (2002; 2013) discusses, but also brings about new considerations of cultural and knowledge production. This interrelationship reveals how Black cultural producers, particularly within UK rap, strategically deploy aesthetic, linguistic, and material signifiers to assert intellectual authority, socio-economic agency, and cultural legitimacy within historically exclusionary spaces, such as the luxury fashion industry (Tulloch, 2016).This intersection not only destabilises traditional hierarchies of taste and value, but also challenges dominant epistemologies by positioning diasporic creativity as a form of theorising in itself. This is what Hall (1992) might call a "thinking through culture", where fashion, lyrics, and self-styling become legitimate modes of producing meaning, resisting marginalisation, and generating alternative knowledge systems rooted in lived Black experiences.

Hip hop has arguably been one of the most 'optimistic' outcomes of colonialism. Without Africans being dispersed to America and Europe, hip hop may not have been what it is today: a phenomenon built and brewed out of oppression and systemic racism (Rose, 1994), the diaspora's cultural currency and an exemplification of their navigational and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). It is by acknowledging the historical root of rap as an African tradition and art form, that we reclaim it as a site of ancestral memory, resistance, and cultural continuity. The cultural heritage of rap resides in the West African oral tradition known as griots4 (Keyes, 2002), as I have mentioned in Chapter One. Perry (2004) explores the poetics of rap, arguing in Prophets of the Hood that rap is an extension of Black poetic, rhetorical and oral traditions. Perry's Afrocentric lens highlights the depth and richness of rap as literary text, emphasising its potential to voice the epistemologies of the oppressed. Alongside Keyes (2002), who offers an ethnomusicological perspective in Rap Music and Street Consciousness, Perry contributes to the understanding of rap as both spiritual and political text, deeply rooted in African

[4] As mentioned in Chapter One, Griots are traditional West African oral historians, poets, and musicians whose role was to preserve community histories and genealogies (Amatokwu, 2009). While Diop (1974) emphasises the centrality of oral tradition in African epistemology, Keyes (2002) draws a direct connection between the griot tradition and the performative, storytelling aspects of rap music in the African diaspora.

(diasporic) traditions. Such acknowledgements of rap music can aid us in steering away from the nationalist and americo-central (Gilroy, 1993; Bramwell, 2011) centricity of hip-hop and rap music mentioned in Chapter One that often positions the United States as the definitive source of its meaning, legitimacy, and evolution. This framing risks obscuring the genre's diasporic roots and overlooking how Black Atlantic cultures and African ancestral traditions (Gilroy, 1993) have continually shaped and informed the development of hip-hop and rap. Gilroy (1993) argues, such centricity can mask the transnational flows of Black cultural expression, which extend beyond national borders and instead speak to shared experiences of displacement, resistance and identity reconstruction. The idea that rap music arose from urban decline and systemic marginalisation informs much of the U.S. hip hop scholarship. Rose (1994) contends that hip-hop is a response to the social and spatial configurations of Black life in post-industrial urban America. Her analysis positions the Bronx in the 1970s as a key site where neoliberal disinvestment, white flight, and public housing decay created conditions of cultural urgency. In this context, hip-hop became a form of counter-narrative and spatial reclamation. Kelley (1997) adds that the political power of early hip-hop lay in its irreverence, its refusal to conform to dominant codes of respectability or labour discipline, aligning the culture with radical working-class traditions.

The emergence of hip hop as a dominant global cultural force is inseparable from the structural conditions of racial capitalism and urban disenfranchisement. As Rose (1994; 2003) argues, hip hop is a response to urban decay. Therefore, how can a cultural resource born from inner-city degeneration evolve into a billion-dollar industry (Chang, 2005)? The answer lies in the capitalist co-optation of Black creativity: The commodification of authenticity, the branding of street culture, and the profitable recycling of Black suffering through music and style. The facets of hip hop and rap music are not only nuanced but deeply embedded in historical, social, and political contexts that shape their evolution and meaning. Entangled in capitalism and urban experiences, hip hop functions as both a critique of systemic inequality and a product of its commercial exploitation. Though partially reshaped; if not compromised by the demands of marketability (Rose, 1994), its cultural potency lies in how it continues to mirror, contest, and reframe the lived realities of marginalised communities across global cities. This ambivalence is not a weakness, but a testament to hip hop's enduring complexity and cultural significance.

The entanglement of hip-hop with capitalism is further explored in the work of Quinn (2005), who focuses on gangsta rap and its appeal to record labels and advertisers. Quinn argues that Black masculinity, street credibility, and narratives of crime have been aestheticised and sold to mass

audiences under the guise of authenticity. This commodification of marginalisation reflects broader patterns of neoliberal exploitation, where Black pain becomes a marketable product. Rap is not only an expressive form but also a terrain where race, gender, class and commerce are actively contested. Crucially, while U.S. hip-hop studies often focus on Black American experiences, these theoretical frameworks have proven immensely adaptable in global contexts. The themes of resistance, aspiration and cultural survival explored by Rose, Kelley and Perry have found echoes in diasporic and localised hip-hop scenes around the world, making these foundational works not just geographically grounded but globally resonant.

2.2.1 Global hip hop

Although hip-hop was born in the urban enclaves of the United States, it has transcended its geographical and cultural origins to become a globalised, multilingual, and politically expressive force. As globalisation intensifies, hip-hop has migrated across borders not as a homogenised cultural export but as a resource that is locally reconstituted to fit varying historical and socio-political terrains. This globalisation of hip-hop must therefore be understood not merely as diffusion or replication but as a process of hybridisation, reclamation, and cultural resistance. Mitchell's Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA (2001) remains one of the most foundational texts in global hip-hop studies. He argues that international forms of hip-hop should not be seen as cultural imperialism, but as active reworkings shaped by local contexts. Mitchell introduces the concept of "glocalization," where global hip-hop culture is continually adapted and reinvented locally to express specific political and social struggles. Such framing challenges the dominance of US-centric models of hip-hop analysis and is critical to this thesis, which focuses on the UK African diaspora and the British-specific cultural terrain from which UK rap emerges.

Fernandes (2011), in Close to the Edge: In Search of the Global Hip-Hop Generation, takes an ethnographic approach, offering in-depth accounts of hip-hop in Cuba, Venezuela and Australia. Fernandes shows that hip-hop is not merely a commercialised musical genre but a discursive platform for youth marginalised by authoritarian regimes and economic disenfranchisement. Her emphasis on "a shared language of struggle" is pertinent to this study's concern with UK rap, where the invocation of luxury fashion brands in lyrics may on the surface appear apolitical but are deeply embedded in narratives of aspiration, racialised social mobility and heritage. These themes reflect how political critique can be encoded in cultural forms that do not conform to overt protest aesthetics.

Osumare's The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop (2007) takes a diasporic approach, arguing that the global connectivity of hip-hop is not incidental but rooted in what she calls "connective marginalities." Osumare (2007) foregrounds the Africanist aesthetic; emphasising rhythm, storytelling, and embodied performance, as a unifying framework through which disparate communities can recognise and respond to shared experiences of marginalisation. This conceptualisation is particularly relevant to my analysis of UK rap as an Afro-diasporic cultural currency. It helps explain how symbolic resources such as brand affiliations, lyrical cadences, and fashion aesthetics circulate in ways that link Black British identity to broader global Black imaginaries.

Language is another crucial vector through which global hip-hop negotiates identity and resistance. In Global Linguistic Flows (2009), Ibrahim, and Pennycook demonstrate how hip-hop artists engage in "glocal" linguistic practices that challenge the monolingual and often colonial assumptions of standardised language. Their work reveals how youth worldwide, particularly in diasporic contexts, merge English with local dialects, urban slang, and indigenous tongues to assert cultural legitimacy and resist assimilation. This aligns with the linguistic capital discussed in Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, which I apply to UK rap's deployment of Jamaican patois, British slang, and African vernaculars as markers of authenticity and cultural rootedness.

The globalisation of hip-hop has also entailed a reimagining of Black consciousness within specific postcolonial contexts. Clark's Hip-Hop in Africa (2018) provides a critical insight into how African rappers use the genre to advance Pan-Africanist, anti-colonial, and feminist discourses. From Ghana to Tanzania, hip-hop becomes a tool for political education and community mobilisation. For instance, Clark identifies how artists fuse Western beats with traditional African instrumentation and lyrical themes that resist neo-colonial economic orders. Her framing is vital to this study's Pan-African conceptual orientation, as it evidences how African-descended communities globally have adapted hip-hop to serve decolonial objectives. Pardue (2011), in his ethnography of Brazilian hip-hop, also underscores the genre's ability to articulate structural inequality from the margins. His analysis of favelas illustrates how rap provides space for working-class youth to express racial pride, confront police brutality, and engage in grassroots activism. While geographically distinct, these insights parallel the urban conditions of the UK's housing estates; sites of both deprivation and cultural production, as noted in the works of Bramwell (2015) and Barron (2013). Pardue's work reinforces the idea that hip-hop's utility lies in its responsiveness to lived experience and its malleability as a form of political expression.

In the European context, Rollefson's Flip the Script (2017) offers a powerful postcolonial critique of European hip-hop scenes. He positions hip-hop as a form of sonic citizenship, particularly for second-generation African and Caribbean youth in cities like London, Paris, and Berlin. Rollefson demonstrates how these artists subvert national narratives of belonging through musical practices that evoke diasporic histories and anti-racist solidarities. His framing of European hip-hop as "transcolonial" underscores the intergenerational trauma and resistance embedded in cultural production, a perspective that speaks directly to the cultural labour of UK rappers navigating postcolonial Britain.

This thesis builds upon these global perspectives by positioning UK rap not simply as a derivative of American hip-hop but as a culturally rich site of Afro-diasporic identity construction and socio-political negotiation. It takes seriously the calls by Mitchell (2001) and Osumare (2007) to decentre US hip-hop and foreground locally rooted expressions that emerge from specific geopolitical and racial contexts. Moreover, the thesis aligns with scholars like Fernandes (2011) and Clark (2018) in reading hip-hop not just as a musical genre but as a field of cultural resistance, deeply implicated in processes of social commentary, economic navigation, and identity politics. Global hip-hop studies are essential in revealing how cultural forms like rap are shaped by and in turn shape global capitalism, racialisation, and transnational networks of resistance. From the favela to the estate, from Havana to Hackney, the themes of aspiration, oppression, pride, and protest are recurring. The globalisation of hip-hop thus confirms its status as what Gilroy (1993) might call a "diasporic dialogue", a transatlantic and global cultural conversation forged through displacement and solidarity. In this sense, UK rap's entanglement with luxury fashion is not a contradiction but a continuation of hip-hop's global grammar of survival, resistance and self-fashioning.

In conclusion, the global hip-hop scholarship, through the works of Mitchell, Fernandes, Osumare, Clark, Rollefson and others, offers a powerful theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding how UK rap operates within a matrix of cultural flows, political economies, and diasporic expression. It foregrounds the importance of reading hip-hop as a locally rooted yet globally resonant practice, and it underscores the need for situated analyses of how Black British artists articulate agency through lyrical content, fashion, and self-branding. This section, therefore, lays the foundation for this thesis's argument that UK rap is a uniquely positioned site of Black British cultural production, both shaped by and shaping global currents of identity, power, and resistance.

2.2.2 UK rap

Today, rap music functions as a dominant cultural resource in Black Britain (Codrington, 2006). The foundations of UK rap can be traced to the early influences of US hip-hop (Turner, 2017). By 2009, US rap had maintained cultural relevance in England for over 35 years, underscoring the need to recognise and analyse UK rap as a distinct and evolving form (Bramwell, 2011, p. 14). Unlike its American counterpart, UK rap is shaped by European social, political, and economic systems, with London serving as its symbolic and sonic epicentre (ibid.). The genre is rooted in the lived experiences of Black British communities (Bramwell, 2015), reflecting both their realities and aspirations. The emergence of the UK rap scene (Bramwell, 2011) within the multicultural environment of London is emblematic of the socio-cultural dynamics facing young people from the UK African diaspora (Collins and Rose, 2016). UK rap thereby embodies navigational and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), articulating the tensions and possibilities faced by Black youth in Britain.

UK rap is a conduit for political and cultural discourse, often mirroring and challenging Britain's dominant societal, economic and political narratives (Perera, 2018; Bramwell, 2015). Through lyrical metaphors, puns and double entendres, rappers articulate complex realities, expressing personal experiences, social critiques and cultural resistance. In the mid-1980s, UK rap developed within working-class communities predominantly comprising Black populations; particularly within London neighbourhoods like Brixton, Peckham, Notting Hill, and Ladbroke Grove (Wood, 2009; Speers, 2017, p. 22; Ogg, 2011). Artists during this period began producing music that responded to both their immediate environment and the global currents of Black musical culture. Their work forged a uniquely British articulation of hip-hop that engaged with both American influences and Caribbean diasporic identities (Wood, 2009). This development placed British music within Gilroy's (1993) concept of the Black Atlantic: a transnational space of cultural exchange, memory and resistance; what my thesis terms as cross-cultural and regional diasporic resonance. To move away from rap and hip hop being 'nationalist' and primarily recognised as American (Gilroy, 1993; Speers, 2017), this work acknowledges groups such as London Posse and Cookie Crew who were among the first to articulate a London-centric Black British rap aesthetic (Wood, 2009; Speers, 2014). London Posse, in particular, integrated sound system culture with US hip-hop conventions to articulate their experience as Black Britons. Their deliberate use of London slang and refusal to adopt American accents signalled a new mode of cultural expression; one that resisted mimicry and centred Black British authenticity. This adaptive and innovative approach framed UK rap not as derivative, but as an assertion of cultural self-determination (Speers, 2014) and authentic linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005).

As discussed in Chapter One, the phenomenon of cross-regional diasporic resonance is key to understanding how UK rap has emerged. Contrary to claims that Black British youth simply replicate American social pathologies through the globalisation of hip-hop (Bramwell, 2011), I argue that UK rappers selectively adapt US rap to articulate their own experiences, conditions and worldviews. This is evident in their use of distinctly local slang, patois and cultural references that constitute forms of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Their lyrics often centre issues unique to Black British life, including racial marginalisation, economic precarity, and cultural hybridity (Adams, 2018; Boakye, 2017). These practices reinforce the idea that UK rap is a genre forged by and for Black Britain (Williams, 2020), not merely an extension of American hip-hop. Genres such as grime (Bramwell, 2011; Barron, 2013; Boakye, 2017; Perera, 2018), UK drill (Ilan, 2020; Dale et al., 2023), and afro-swing (refs) illustrate how UK rap comprises diverse sub-genres that reflect generational identities and diasporic trajectories. These branches are not stylistic fads, but cultural outputs emerging from specific socio-political conditions. The sonic innovations: sampling, accent variations and rhythmic adaptations, highlight how UK rap artists shape a culturally distinct genre (Williams, 2013). While many scholars focus on individual sub-genres, my thesis unites these branches to offer a comprehensive cultural analysis. In my content analysis of UK rap lyrics from songs released between 2014 and 2024, I draw from across these sub-genres to examine how each reflects cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and diasporic heritage. Notably, I also explore how notions of authenticity intersect with luxury fashion mentions, complicating the commodification of Black cultural identity and expression, as well as perceptions of neoliberalism.

This thesis aims to demonstrate how UK rap functions as an Afro-diasporic cultural currency by drawing upon inherited traditions of Black expression, repurposing them within a British context, and exporting them as new forms of cultural knowledge, resistance, and identity-making. It embodies what Gilroy (1993) terms the transmission of Black expressive forms across the Atlantic, deepened by dislocation, struggle, and hybridity. UK rap operates as a mode of communication that carries the symbolic weight of Black -Britishness, Afro-Caribbean heritage, and African diasporic resilience. In doing so, it serves as a repository for cultural memory and a dynamic generator of meaning; what Yosso (2005) would identify as cultural capital. Yet, unlike traditional notions of capital defined by Western elitism (Bourdieu, 1986), this is capital rooted in oral traditions, aesthetic innovation, and socio-political survival. As a form of Afro-diasporic cultural currency, UK rap does not simply reflect identity; it constructs it. It allows marginalised Black youth to engage with their heritage, critique their positioning in society, and assert agency through stylistic and lyrical choices. UK rap mobilises sound,

style, and speech as tools of resistance and cultural affirmation; possibly seen in what Gilroy (1993) calls "politics of transfiguration." In doing so, it enables an ongoing negotiation of Black diasporic identity in postcolonial Britain, offering both a mirror and a megaphone for those often silenced or misrepresented in dominant narratives (Huq, 2006; Bramwell, 2015). This currency is audible, visible, and marketable; and is being increasingly recognised not only by academics (Bramwell, 2015; Morgan, 2009) but by global fashion (Tulloch, 2016), branding (Anderson, 2020), and cultural industries (Negus, 2002), which now draw from UK rap's creative energy, cultural authority, social cachet, and Afro-diasporic distinctiveness.

Authenticity has long been a central concern in rap studies (Wright, 2010; Speers, 2017). It is often framed as an ontological marker of whether an artist's expressions are 'real' or grounded in lived experience (Keller, 2014). Speers (2014) introduces the idea of "living out," whereby authenticity is performed through the negotiation of one's social identity, experiences, and lyrical content. This is particularly relevant to my study: when UK rappers mention luxury brands in lyrics grounded in personal struggle or marginalisation, they reveal the interplay of aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital through linguistic capital. As Chang (2007) notes, rap is fundamentally a street-rooted cultural phenomenon. Its legitimacy derives from its proximity to real-life struggles (Rose, 1994; Forman, 2000). Bramwell (2015) argues that UK rappers assert authenticity by embedding their narratives within the context of urban hardship, racial injustice, and personal transformation. Authentic expression, however, is multifaceted. It embodies sincerity, originality, truth, and cultural relevance (Williams et al., 2020). Authenticity serves as an analytical lens through which we can explore how UK rappers articulate their racialised experiences; often shaped by double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; Gilroy, 1993); and how they can transform those into meaningful cultural 'texts'. These expressions build cultural resonance among Black British listeners, reinforcing shared understandings of identity, struggle, and pride. I argue that this Black collective resonance functions similarly to cross-regional diasporic resonance, helping to explain the communicative power and relevance of UK rap within diasporic communities in Britain. Importantly, these expressions of authenticity are not only rooted in self-disclosure and community reflection but are also inherently political. They represent everyday resistance to dominant narratives that seek to marginalise or misrepresent Black British youth. As Cutler (2007) and Ibrahim (2009) suggest, the linguistic and stylistic choices of rappers from racialised backgrounds can function as tools of symbolic resistance, marking UK rap as a space where cultural agency and subversion thrive.

The oppositional stance often present in UK rap further affirms its subcultural and countercultural roots. As a youth subculture (Dedman, 2011), UK rap resists mainstream norms and celebrates alternative modes of self-definition. Both UK and US rap share countercultural foundations (Rose, 1994; Fatsis, 2018; Williams, 2020), using music as a means of dissent. As Hebdige (1979) explains, subcultures use style to enact "semiotic resistance." Countercultures, meanwhile, are more explicitly oppositional, rejecting dominant cultural frameworks in favour of new ideals and identities (Roszak, 1969; Hall and Jefferson, 1975). UK rap occupies both positions; its sartorial choices, lyrical content, and public performances frequently subvert hegemonic discourses. However, not all academic accounts treat UK rap favourably. Cohen's (1955) subcultural theory frames subcultures as delinquent responses to working-class failure, a problematic lens that reinforces stereotypes of UK rap as deviant or criminal (Talbot, 2011). This view erases the cultural agency and wealth that emerge from these communities (Yosso, 2005). Artists like Skepta and Stormzy disprove Cohen's pathologising narrative as well as contradict it, illustrating instead that subcultural creativity can lead to mainstream success and global cultural influence. As Hebdige (1979) asserts, subcultural meaning is often distorted by media narratives; something UK rap has continually grappled with. Media representations of UK rap have often leaned into racialised stereotypes, particularly around gang violence. These portrayals ignore the positive social functions of UK rap, including its role in providing economic opportunities, fostering community cohesion, and supporting rehabilitation through music. In contrast to genres like heavy metal, whose violent lyrics are rarely scrutinised (Sharman and Dingle, 2015; Mast and McAndrew, 2011), UK rap has been disproportionately policed (Fatsis, 2019) and even used as evidence in criminal trials (Quinn, 2024). Such treatment reinforces institutional biases that pathologise Black cultural expression. My research counters these narratives by examining lyrics through a decolonial lens, foregrounding themes of empowerment, aspirations, heritage, and social critique. Fatsis (2018; 2019) and Hall et al. (2022) challenge the criminalisation of UK rap, positioning it as a vital form of urban cultural expression. This view aligns with my own, which recognises UK rap as a generative and expressive outlet for Black British youth. Rather than a threat to social order, UK rap offers insight into the socio-political conditions that shape young people's lives and aspirations.

UK rap contributes meaningfully to the identity formation of British youth (Bramwell, 2015). It provides a dynamic space for the articulation of local, national, and diasporic identities, particularly among Black British communities negotiating complex socio-political terrains (Dedman, 2011; Adams, 2018). The genre functions as a platform through which youth engage in self-representation, challenge dominant narratives, and express belonging to transnational Black cultures. This thesis contributes new insight to existing scholarship by interrogating the intersection between UK rap and luxury

fashion, illustrating how lyrical references to designer brands are not merely aesthetic or aspirational gestures but carry deeper socio-cultural significance. It positions UK rap as more than a vehicle of musical expression; rather, it is a Black British cultural currency, an active force of symbolic and material value that reshapes cultural economies. This thesis understands UK rap as a site of cultural economy (Du Gay and Pryke, 2002), where lyrical content, identity performance, and stylistic expression generate symbolic capital and commercial value, both for artists and for industries such as luxury fashion. UK rap as a cultural currency not only fosters a sense of pride and heritage within the UK African diaspora but also generates capital from which the global luxury fashion sector benefits, often without adequately acknowledging its roots in Black British creativity and resistance.

2.3 Diaspora studies

Throughout this thesis, when I refer to the UK African diaspora concerning UK rap, I am referring to people of African and Caribbean descent who are British by nationality and have been born and/or raised in the United Kingdom as an outcome of immigration, slavery and colonialism. This group comes under the fourth Afro-diasporic stream — characterised by post-war migration, racialised social positioning, and the formation of new Black British identities (Hall, 1990; Brah, 1996). However, this thesis specifically focuses on members of the UK African diaspora belonging to the Millennial and Gen-Z generational cohorts—those born between 1981 and 2012 (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Lyons and Kuron, 2014). Recognising generational dynamics are crucial to understanding the cultural production of the UK African Diaspora. While older generations may focus on assimilation or community preservation, younger diasporic subjects often engage in creative negotiations of identity. They participate in what Mainsah (2013) refers to as "digital diasporas," using online platforms to circulate music, fashion, and visual culture that reflect hybrid identities. This is particularly salient in the case of UK rap, where artists deploy diasporic aesthetics: linguistic codes, fashion references, and sonic textures; to assert cultural authority and authenticity (Osborne and Akindes, 2020). In doing so, they contribute to a broader Black British aesthetic that is diasporic in origin but locally grounded. As stated in Chapter One, my research does not claim representativeness of the entire African diaspora; instead, it recognises the diaspora as a heterogeneous formation, shaped by diverse histories, identities, and lived experiences.

The UK African Diaspora comprises a diverse and multilayered population shaped by distinct migration waves, including postcolonial migration from former British colonies such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, as well as more recent arrivals from conflict-affected regions like Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Olusoga, 2016). While often homogenised in public discourse (Back, 1996), the diaspora encompasses a wide range of national, ethnic, linguistic, and generational identities. Gilroy (1993) argues that this diversity is central to the formation of a diasporic "Black Atlantic" culture—one forged through displacement, resistance, and cultural hybridity. According to the 2011 UK Census, over 1.8 million people identified as "Black/African/Caribbean/Black British," with significant populations concentrated in urban centres such as London, Birmingham, and Manchester. This demographic heterogeneity is crucial for understanding the cultural production of UK rap and its rootedness in both Pan-Africanist sensibilities and localised expressions of Black British identity because the multiplicity of African heritages, languages, religions, and colonial histories shapes the lyrical content, aesthetic choices, and political consciousness of artists, allowing UK rap to serve as a site of diasporic dialogue, resistance, and identity reconstruction (Gilroy, 1993; Rose, 1994; Bramwell, 2011, 2015).

The term diaspora, derived from the Greek word meaning "to scatter" (Cohen, 1997), has evolved from its initial association with the Jewish experience of exile to a broader analytical category used to understand the experiences of various displaced populations (Clifford, 1994). In contemporary scholarship, diaspora is not only understood as a condition of geographical dispersal but also as a dynamic cultural and political formation shaped by historical processes such as colonialism, slavery, globalisation, and forced migration (Cohen, 2008; Brubaker, 2005). Foundational theorists such as Hall (1990) emphasise that diasporic identities are "productions which are never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation." Hall's perspective foregrounds the ongoing negotiation of identity among diasporic populations and highlights the role of cultural expression in this process. Building on Hall's (1990) assertion, UK rap emerges as a particularly rich cultural site where these negotiations of diasporic identity play out (Codrington, 2007). Rooted in the lived experiences of the African and Caribbean youth in Britain, UK rap operates as both an expressive and political medium that articulates heritage, marginality, and aspiration. As such, UK rap exemplifies how diasporic cultural production, through lyrics, fashion, and performance; becomes a space for identity reconfiguration, resistance, and visibility within the broader socio-political fabric of postcolonial Britain. Clifford (1994) challenges static notions of diasporic identity by focusing on movement, hybridity, and the politics of location. He introduces the concept of diaspora as a "traveling term," constantly shifting depending on the geopolitical and cultural context. Brah (1996) builds on

this by proposing the idea of "diasporic space," a site of intersection where multiple histories of displacement converge. This approach disrupts binary logics of home and host, emphasising instead the entanglement of identities and histories in diaspora. Gilroy's (1993) concept of the Black Atlantic expands the analytical scope of diaspora studies by positioning the Atlantic Ocean as a site of cultural exchange and political struggle, where Black diasporic identities are forged through the entangled histories of slavery, colonialism, and modernity. This thesis recognises those very entanglements as a critical catalyst for the formation of UK Afro-diasporic cultural currency.

UK rap, as a dynamic site of diasporic expression, exemplifies how cultural production can emerge from the intersections of transposition, memory, and resistance. The genre is not merely a by-product of global hip-hop influence but a complex articulation of Black British identity grounded in diasporic histories and a strong awareness of ancestral heritage (Codrington, 2007). Its linguistic innovation, sonic hybridity, and socio-political commentary (Huq, 2006) position it firmly within broader diasporic frameworks that challenge essentialist or static notions of identity. Clifford's (1994) influential rethinking of diaspora as a "traveling term" underscores this complexity; diasporic identity is not fixed but shaped by movement, hybridity, and location. Similarly, Brah's (1996) notion of "diasporic space"[5] provides a useful framework for understanding UK rap as a cultural site where narratives of migration, colonialism, and fusion converge. Artists navigate and narrate these spaces through lyrics that foreground themes of belonging, exclusion, aspiration, and critique.

In conceptualising the UK African Diaspora within the intellectual lineage of Hall (1990), Gilroy (1993), Clifford (1994), Brah (1996), and Codrington (2007), this thesis understands it as a heterogeneous and evolving formation. It encompasses both first-generation immigrants from African or Caribbean countries and their UK-born descendants, united not by a singular cultural or national identity but by shared experiences of racialisation, migration, and resistance. The UK African Diaspora is shaped by Britain's colonial past, post-war immigration policies, and contemporary neoliberal multiculturalism, making it a complex site of belonging and contestation (Reynolds, 2006; Erel, Murji and Nahaboo, 2016). Unlike monolithic or essentialist understandings of identity (Hall, 1996), the diasporic framework (Gilroy, 1993; Brah, 1996) allows for an exploration of how UK Afro-diasporic youth actively produce cultural meanings through music, fashion, and other forms of expression.

[5] Brah (1996) defines "diasporic space" as a conceptual terrain in which the entanglements of diasporic, indigenous, and migrant histories are negotiated, foregrounding power relations and hybridity over singular national or ethnic origins.

The diasporic condition is also marked by its orientation toward both homeland and hostland. As Zeleza (2005) argues, African diasporas are not merely defined by their dislocation but by their transnational linkages; through remittances, digital communication, and cultural flows. In the UK context, these linkages are visible in the musical genres that dominate diasporic youth culture: UK rap, Afroswing, grime, and drill often reference places, languages, and styles from the African and Caribbean communities (Back, 1996; Gilroy, 2000; Williams and Copes, 2022), while articulating experiences of urban Britain (Huq, 2006; Bramwell, 2015). These expressions can be understood as forms of "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (Bhabha, 1996), where local and global influences are blended to produce unique cultural forms.

Demographically, the UK African Diaspora is diverse and rapidly growing. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2022), the population identifying as "Black African" in England and Wales has increased significantly over the past two decades, particularly in metropolitan areas such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds. The diasporic community includes migrants from Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Congo, among others, each contributing distinct languages, religions, and cultural practices. The UK African diaspora also encompasses Black Caribbean communities, who have played a foundational role in shaping Black British music and cultural production; particularly through genres such as reggae, dub, lovers rock, and early UK hip-hop; laying the groundwork for contemporary expressions like grime and UK rap (Gilroy, 1993; Back, 1996; Bradley, 2013). The UK Afro-diasporic Caribbean community comprises predominantly of Jamaican, Trinidadian, Barbadian, and St Lucian descent; many of whom arrived during the Windrush era and have played a foundational role in shaping Black British cultural and political life (Hall, 1992; Gilroy, 1993; Bryan, 2020). While the categories of 'African' and 'Caribbean' are often administratively separated in UK census data (ONS, 2022), they are inextricably linked through shared histories of colonialism, displacement, and cultural expression in Britain. From a Pan-African standpoint, they are understood as part of a unified diasporic identity rooted in solidarity, resistance, and cultural continuity (Nkrumah, 1963; Adi, 2018). Within this wider diasporic grouping, generational differences are particularly significant. The experiences and identifications of first-generation migrants often differ from those of their children, who navigate British cultural settings while retaining connections to African and Caribbean heritage (Owusu, 2000; Clark, 2008). This dual heritage often manifests in creative forms such as UK rap, which synthesises diverse Black diasporic influences into a distinctly British articulation of identity, belonging, and resistance. This synthesis exemplifies what Du Bois (1903) theorised as “double consciousness”; in the case of my thesis, the internal negotiation of being both Black and British, simultaneously shaped by African diasporic memory and the lived realities of

racialisation in Britain. UK rap, in this sense, becomes a sonic and lyrical space where these dual identities are not only expressed but critically reimagined.

The UK African Diaspora's cultural production cannot be separated from its political and economic conditions. Scholars such as Parmar (2022) and Mirza (2013) emphasise that diasporic communities often face racialised exclusions in housing, education and employment. Despite these systemic barriers, many have leveraged cultural capital to gain visibility and mobility, echoing Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital is helpful here, but needs to be expanded to include what Puwar (2004) and Skeggs (2004) describe as "affective" and "embodied" capital: Forms of value generated through style, speech and social performance. The UK African diasporic youth turn to music, fashion and social media not only as forms of self-expression but also as strategies for economic survival and social ascension. The economic dimension aligns with the idea of "diaspora as resource" (Kleist and Vammen, 2012), whereby diasporic networks and identities are mobilised for both material and symbolic gain. In the realm of UK rap, artists use diasporic references to distinguish themselves within a saturated global music market, crafting narratives that resonate with both local and international audiences. The popularity of diaspora-inflected slang and transnational collaborations all point to the commercial viability of diasporic cultural production (Miller, 2021; Tulloch, 2019). Thus, the UK African Diaspora functions not merely as a background identity but as a generative force in shaping cultural economies.

In sum, this thesis positions the UK African Diaspora within an expansive and evolving scholarly terrain that conceptualises diaspora as fluid, intersectional and politically significant. Engaging with foundational theorists such as Hall and Gilroy, alongside contemporary literature on digital culture, cultural capital and postcolonial identity, this literature review section establishes the diasporic conditions as central to the analysis of UK rap and its entanglement with luxury fashion brands. Rather than treating diaspora as a backdrop, this thesis foregrounds it as a structuring force; one that shapes the aesthetic choices, lyrical narratives and cultural strategies of black UK rappers. The diasporic context deployed in this thesis offers a critical lens through which to understand how identity, heritage and representation converge, revealing the cultural currency of UK rap as both a national expression and a transnational discourse with global resonance.

2.3.1 Pan-African Thought and the Soundtracks of the Diaspora

As discussed in the prior section, the cataclysm of slavery, colonialism and racism has shaped the experiences of the African diaspora and their musical expressions (Gilroy, 1993; Rose, 1994; Davis, 1998; Radano and Bohlman, 2000). Dating back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Black music served as a crucial expression for Black people to employ music to express their critical social theories, encompassing aesthetic, political and philosophical dimensions (Gilroy, 1993, p. 79). In the modern context, rap musicians persist in articulating social commentary safeguard their humanity and fuel their spirit of resilience (Walvin, 1999). Black music, as a broad definition, has facets of Black cultures from Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas (McGinty, 1993), from which Gilroy terms the expressive culture of the Black Atlantic; he posits that Black people have endeavoured and contesting racial inequities and disparities (Kitwana, 2002). Rose (1994, p. 102) unfittingly proposes that within contemporary popular culture, rappers are "vocal and unruly stray dogs". She argues that this metaphor is deemed fitting for rappers, mainly due to the tendency of certain US rappers such as Snoop Dogg to integrate the word 'dog' or 'dogg' into their stage names. While respecting her pioneering work, a significant flaw in this specific explanation lies in her characterisation of Black rap artists as "stray dogs", which undermines the profound Afro-diasporic contributions of these artists, diluting their cultural wealth to lost and wandering expressions. This terminology is not only detrimental but also obscures the multifaceted impact that Black people have while simultaneously perpetuating harmful stereotypes associated with Black men. Rose's analogy proves to be unsuitable for analysing UK rap, as it evokes the nostalgia of the divisive signs from the 1950s in Britain that proclaimed 'no Irish, no Blacks, no dogs' (Favell, 2020). This consideration may elucidate the absence of UK rap artists who incorporate 'dog' into their rap persona or stage name. The UK rap artists have crafted ethnic perspectives that serve as distinct representations of Black British identities, reflecting the injustices and grievances they have inherited from their parents (Barron, 2013). We cannot assume that their parents' and grandparents', or even great grandparents' injustices have not affected their cultural negotiations. During the colonial era, individuals of African descent were regarded as subhuman, often being exhibited in human zoos (Brown, 2015) and subsequently represented as gollywogs (Favell, 2020). Therefore, I must contest Rose's analogy that equates rap artists to stray dogs, irrespective of her metaphorical emphasis. Furthermore, her explanation fails to account for Afro-diasporic slang in rap music and what slang words such as 'dog' exemplify in terms of identity and community.

Black music has always played a significant role in preserving a robust sense of identity, community, and hope amidst the harrowing experiences Black people have endured (Baraka, 1963; Walvin, 1999; Gilroy, 1993). Rap music was born out of black subjugation (Rose, 1994). Speers (2017, p. 10) references Kitwana (2006), who argues that hip hop should not be viewed as a mere synthesis of various cultures, but rather as an expression of Black culture, a perspective with which I concur. Speers references Kitwana's explanation regarding the ownership of hip hop by Black culture: “Those who suggest it isn’t, are confused, misled, trying to appropriate Black youth culture or are too culturally arrogant to realise they are appropriating” (p. 126). Agreed, those who assert that rap and hip-hop represent an amalgamation of cultures outside of Black culture are not only misguided and culturally presumptuous but lack an understanding of the profound significance that Black music holds for Black individuals’ emancipation. No other group has encountered the fight for liberation to the same degree (Walvin, 2000). Speers (2017) fundamentally misses the point by erroneously aligning Afro-centrism with nationalism in her endeavour to substantiate that Kitwana's (2006) perspectives have faced criticism from Gilroy (1993), which, again, Speers has misinterpreted. Her assertion draws upon a part of Gilroy's work, which I previously referenced in Chapter One, wherein he poses the question, “What is it about Black America’s writing elite which means they need to claim this diasporic cultural form in such an assertively nationalist way?” (p. 34). Here, he advocates for a shift away from the perception of Black music solely as a means of nationalist expression, emphasising the importance of acknowledging Afro-diasporic cultural resources as one. Afro-centricism refers to the positioning of African ideas as central to any examination of African culture and behaviours, encompassing the diaspora as well. It is a mode of thought and action in which the primacy of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate (Asante, 1987). Afrocentrism represents a cultural and ideological framework aimed at centring African history, culture and perspectives, thereby reclaiming African identity from the biases inherent in Eurocentric narratives (Asante, 1987, p. 6). Asante has articulated that hip-hop and rap music are an Afrocentric art form (Asante, 2008). Black people have been generous with their musical resources, inviting others to participate in their cultural expressions (Kitwana, 2006), seen with rock n roll and hip-hop (George, 1988; Mahon, 2020). Academic discourse surrounding rap music necessitates an exploration of the genre that duly recognises the diaspora's contributions while also considering the distinct contributions of various diasporic communities. For example, one must acknowledge that African Americans have significantly shaped US hip-hop, UK rap has emerged from the contributions of Black British individuals, and reggae has its roots in the Jamaican experience thus illustrating the multifaceted nature of Afro-diasporic cultural expressions, which collectively demonstrate the richness of Black music.

While this thesis espouses a Pan-Africanist perspective to establish Caribbeans as part of the African diaspora, it is crucial to credit the Caribbean communities and their art forms, such as Carnival, sound systems, and calypso in articulating political expressions within Black British communities in the UK. Caribbean cultural expressions have carried the collective voices and frustrations of the UK African diaspora for a significant period. These cultural forms have been utilised as tools against subjugation, served as forms of political expression, and contributed to the formation of identity. Sound systems and calypso have operated as outlets for political identity and resistance in the UK, playing a role in Black British cultural politics and anti-racist struggles (Gilroy, 1987). Hall (1975) explores how sound systems and Carnival have been arenas of resistance against dominant cultural norms; these practices have been interconnected to the dynamics of race, identity and power in Britain (Hall, 1975). Hebdige (1987) also examines the role of calypso and reggae in shaping Black British identity, highlighting how these musical forms have been tools for social commentary in the UK, arguably setting the bar for grime, which provides an understanding of the lives of Black working-class urban youth (Bramwell, 2011; 2015; Adams, 2019). Today, UK rap represents an evolution of these expressions, incorporating other influences from Africa (Bramwell, 2011, p. 14), US hip-hop (Turner, 2017) and a compilation of genres such as UK garage (Fatsis, 2018).

As I investigate the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora, I postulate that UK rap cannot be discussed without acknowledging that post-colonial experiences of racial oppression will forever be rooted in slavery, colonialism and disenfranchisement. The UK rap is a critical cultural expression for young, Black, marginalised individuals (Adams, 2019) to express their experiences and identities (Rose, 1994). The UK rap functions as a creative channel through which the contemporary youth of the UK African diaspora seek to emancipate themselves from the oppressive systems that have historically plagued them and preceding generations. Several scholars discuss rap music as a form of expression against oppression, and as a medium for self-definition, cultural identity, and political liberation. Rose (1994) states that, rap music serves as a means of communicating the lived experiences of African American youth, thereby challenging prevailing societal structures and offering a platform for resistance against racial and economic oppression. Dyson (2007) concurs with Rose (1994) and asserts that rap music is a vehicle for social critique and empowerment. However, Rose posits that when rap music is commodified, its vital facets of resistance can be diluted by mainstream media. Codrington (2007) enhances Rose's argument and states that US rap is artistically diluted and highly commercialised. But like Dyson (2007), I contest that notion because irrespective of commercialisation, the cultural DNA of all Black music genres, whether commercialised or not, is rooted in subversion. Giving too much authority to White-owned mainstream media surrounding rap

is a call for decolonial backing in scholarly work. An enduring motif within Black music as a cultural asset pertains to the conveyance of social and economic inequalities, the expression of frustration arising from racial oppression, and the assertion of resistance, all of which are deeply ingrained in the lived and authentic experiences of Black individuals (Terkourafi, 2010; Lewis, 2021). Suppression is the catalyst of the emergence of rap music (Terkourafi, 2010), and therefore cannot be diluted. In the case of UK rap, as long as the Black public sphere in London (Bramwell, 2011) exists, UK African diasporan cultural products such as music will continue to thrive and be meaningful agents for liberation. Within what Bramwell (2011) states is a partially hidden social formation that is reproduced in the household, schools, the internet, magazines and nightclubs; I contend that this is where the brewing of the UK African diaspora's cultural currency is solidified and grows to decolonise the mind; a social sanctuary for Black cultural cultivation.

Reviewing literature surrounding a Pan-Africanist school of thought is imperative to elucidate discussions surrounding the UK African diaspora's cultural currency, UK rap. Du Bois (1903; 1947) was one of the founding figures of Pan-African ideologies. He stressed the necessity of solidarity among individuals of African heritage to overcome the implications of slavery and colonialism. Asante (1988) later underlined critical factors that define Pan-Africanism. Firstly, the genesis of Pan-Africanism resides in the cultural bonds among individuals of African heritage within and beyond Africa's borders. Pan-Africanism advocates for acknowledging and commemorating shared African heritage, irrespective of whether one identifies as Caribbean, American or British (Asante, 1988). Like Du Bois, Asante asserts that a foundation of unity is imperative to effectively counteract the enduring consequences of slavery and colonialism, both of which have consistently aimed to fragment and subvert African cultures, which Diop (1963) concurs. Pan-Africanism addresses colonial and neo-colonial systems that hinder the sovereignty of African-descended people in Britain and other regions (Asante, 1988), which is a theoretical framework I employ to examine UK rap as a cultural currency for Black Britain and identify examples of decolonisation. Pan-Africanism is rooted in anti-colonialism (Fanon, 1961) and is, therefore a force behind decolonisation.

Music can decolonise the mind and mobilise Black people to resist 'the powers that be'. It is a potent tool in asserting African identity and pride, illustrating that despite subjugation and devaluation, Black cultural practices endure (Fanon, 1961). However, Fanon (1952) and Thiong'o (1986) accentuate language as decolonisation's primary practice. Fanon underlines how the coloniser's language has been imposed on the colonised, leading to the dominance of the coloniser's culture and worldview, which Thiong'o recognises as a tactic for control over the Black mind and to alienate those of African

descent from their own cultures, histories and identities, resulting in a sense of inferiority. Hence, he espouses the notion of returning to Indigenous languages as a means to attain genuine autonomy and self-determination (Thiong'o, 1986). However, Fanon and Thiong'o's arguments rely too heavily on languages being the most effective way to decolonise the mind. We must consider forms of decolonisation that reflect the times we are living in; many young people of African descent in the diaspora cannot speak their native languages fluently, but it does not negate how they can actively generate and illustrate cultural resources that decolonise not only the mind but also scenes in the colonisers land.

When referring to the UK rap or luxury fashion scene, I denote the formal and informal nature of industries, infrastructures, audiences, and institutions (Stahl, 2004, p.54). UK rappers can decolonise the music industry through what they say. They can also decolonise the luxury fashion scene by infiltrating and unapologetically being themselves, operating from the African cultural system that Asante (1988) states is accessible to any Black person. Thus, when a UK rapper places their African or Caribbean heritage as the foundation of their identity in these scenes, they amplify Afro-centricity and Black cultural wealth and resist Euro-centric norms (Asante, 1988). However, when members of the UK African diaspora align themselves with the African cultural system, there is some sort of an anomaly that I argue, results from the double consciousness that Du Bois (1903) coined and, as mentioned earlier, Gilroy (1993) appropriated. Du Bois states the following in the first chapter of his book *Souls of Black Folk* (1903):

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness-an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

It is not easy navigating a duality in identity (Gilroy, 1993) in contemporary Britain. The looming aura of one's ancestral struggles and assuredness in heritage (Codrington, 2006) combined with the twoness that Du Bois (1903) highlights, but in the context of being Black and British, is complex. The "two un-reconciled strivings" that Du Bois underscores are rooted in the battle of identity that Gilroy (1993) investigates. This identity conflict gives rise to experiences of alienation and inequality as individuals of African descent grapple with the task of harmonising their sense of self within societies

that diminish the significance of their heritage and impose Western standards and principles. The role of cultural production, particularly music, is not only a means of resisting inequality but also responding to it (Gilroy, 1993), whether racially or even concerning socio-economic issues. Black culture in London serves as a defence mechanism against race and class systems that are deeply intertwined (Hall *et al*., 1978, p. 380) and are both characterised by bigotry. The legacy of slavery and colonialism has created a racialised class structure in which Black people, especially in the West, are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder (Gilroy, 1993). Thus, a Black British person embodying the double-consciousness that Du Bois (1903) and Gilroy (1993) refer to faces economic and racial oppression, underlining a twoness in not only identity but also lived experiences.

Double consciousness produces a new playing field for Black cultural expressions, which I identify in UK rap. It aids in the contemporary ingeminating, remodelling, and echoing of the very basis of black music; expressions against oppression. These expressions do not necessarily need to be overtly defiant because black people thriving through creative mediums that were supposedly beaten out of them generations before but still thrive today, albeit differently, are the manifestations of how this double consciousness has morphed into a new way of being or, as Thiong'o (1986) states, the new Africans. He employs this terminology to describe individuals of African heritage who have been moulded by the colonial education system and have been consistently exposed to Western cultural norms. However, I contend that Black people who have these experiences can make lemonade out of lemons and use their experiences of inequality that Gilroy (1987; 1993) highlights and their 'new African' (Thiong'o, 1986) mind-set to generate a plethora of cultural wealth that is seen through UK rap and its intersection with luxury fashion brands.

2.4 Rap music and luxury

There is no denying that luxury brands and rap music have a symbiotic relationship. But to present it as a monolithic phenomenon, as scholars have done, highlights neglect in considerations of how rap music outside of America intertwines with luxury brands. Academics have primarily focused on the intersection between rap and fashion in a blatantly Americanised context (Chandler and Chandler-Smith, 2005; Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012; Sacasa and Mariduena, 2023; Boyd, 2024). They present their work in a way that would lead one to assume that all rap artists intersect with luxury fashion brands in the same way. I have had to draw on these American-central sources to investigate the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay because of its little recognition within academia, which contrasts its acknowledgement in journalism and social media.

While there are parallels between UK and US rap's relationship with luxury brands that are both Black diasporic cultural resources, how both genres intersect with luxury brands differs because of what I propose to be differences in subcultural identity and dress (Dedman, 2011), which I discuss later in this chapter. On one level, Black British people and African Americans identify with being Black in systematically racist countries. Still, on the other hand, their Black "infrastructures" differ (Codrington, 2006). I recognise that as a factor in how each group within rap music intersects with luxury brands. Black America and Black Britain have several cultural differences (Codrington, 2006). Thus, their dress, style narratives, and fashion identities (Tulloch, 2010) inform how UK and US rap intersect with luxury brands. These intersections differ. Whilst Miller (2011) acknowledges Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993) music as being potent when writing about the intersection between fashion and music, and as much as I am indebted to her extensive work on this juncture, I view her discussion on gangsta rap and clothing, which she aligns with her assertion that the "most important" facet of rap fashion is an emphasis on conspicuous consumption (Miller, 2011, p. 117), to be relatively surface level. Although her analysis is valid to an extent, it is primarily rooted in the focus on the corporeal forms and lifestyles of rappers in the US, producing a hip-hop/rap aesthetic characterised by opulence (Mukherjee, 2006). Miller does, however, point out that this conspicuous consumption is not the same as Veblen's (1899) notion of the term, to which I concur, but rather "an adoption of such patterns of consumption as a symbolic way of constructing an affluent identity for those not expected to enjoy such a position historically" (Miler, 2011, p.117). Rather than status, I view the prevalence of conspicuousness in rap as a tool for social mobility rather than constructing an affluent identity, that is, in the present day. However, limiting the way Black rappers intersect with luxury brands to reasons of colonial infection and after-effects on the Black race and diaspora is to disregard the possibilities of history repeating itself and how Black people before the colonial plague intertwined with luxury, to then use as a lens to analyse how Black rappers utilise luxury brands today. While Miller (2011) dedicates a chapter in her book *Fashion and Music* to cultural identities when discussing rap music, she does not at any point relate the way rap artists utilise luxury fashion brands or luxurious jewellery to their ancestral heritage but only mentions African heritage at fleeting moments when referring to the African diaspora. However, this is not a result of negligence but an outcome of Black epistemology being underrepresented in fashion studies.

Africa's lost histories have impacted the lack of Black knowledge; such a loss has resulted in how many academics have framed Black people to relate to and with luxury, such as Arnold (2001), Chandler and Chandler-Smith (2005), and Miller (2011), whose work insinuates that Black rappers lean on luxury

brands as compensation for their skin colour through ostentation. Why is there barely any discussion regarding the parallels between the interactions of contemporary Black rappers with luxury and those in pre-colonial Africa? While this line of inquiry may invite critique by comparing historical and contemporary perspectives, I draw reassurance from Hall's (1980) essay, *Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms*. He articulates that in rigorous and critical intellectual endeavours, what holds significance are the critical junctures where established paradigms are challenged, previous frameworks are reconfigured, and the old and new are regrouped. The scholarly concepts of rap and luxury fashion excessively attribute influence to White authorities and their efforts to indoctrinate the Black psyche.

To be Black is to identify with African histories of rich culture and wealth as much as hardships. To decolonise is to acknowledge the rich culture and wealth that existed in pre-colonial Africa but is lost in knowledge. Diop (1974; 1987) was patronised for his views of ancient Egyptians being Black (Okpewho, 1981; Clarke, 1989). His perspectives on Egypt as a Black civilisation provoked hostility from Eurocentric historians (Clarke, 1989). However, his opinions were based on empirical studies in the hard sciences, which he utilised to prove the melanin concentration in mummified remains (Diop, 1974; Clarke, 1989). In *Nations Nègres et Culture* (1954), Diop criticised Western historians for reinforcing beliefs of the inferiority of Black people. He advocated for histories that re-valued African history and showcased the significant contributions of Black individuals to global history (Manela and Streets-Salter, 2023, pp.135–161), which is also an aim of this work in the contemporary context.

The reason for drawing on Diop's evidenced assertions about ancient Egypt and his denouncing of inaccurate Western views is because it is known that luxury is a concept with a lengthy history and was an intrinsic feature of ancient Egypt (Kapferer, 2009), which exhibited luxurious fashion and dress (Cabigiosu, 2020). Similarly, Mansa Mūsā was known for his fine clothing, as seen during his flamboyant visit to Cairo and his pilgrimage to Mecca (Coleman, 2018), as well as his propensity for emphasising public image through gold (Harris, 2020). Likewise, the Asante kingdom was known for its splendour of gold jewellery, which was an important art form used by the Asante people to convey their sociocultural identity and distinctiveness (Fening *et al*., 2023). In the same vein, rappers have established their aesthetic with their gold pendants and medallions (Miller, 2011). These pre-colonial examples of Black people using luxury as a means of expression and assertions of identity are no different to how rap artists use luxury today. The only difference is that, today, it is not primarily gold but also luxury brands.

In the same way that rap music is a contemporary manifestation of West African griot traditions (Appert, 2016) and rap artists are modern-day griots (Charry, 2012, pp. 79-91), they are also contemporary representations of how Black people intersect with luxury. This notion is not only grounded in the construction of affluent identities (Arnold, 2001; Miller, 2011) and should not be reduced to the yearning for "bling" grounded in the American dream (Chandler and Chandler-Smith, 2005, p. 241; Miller, 2011). Rather than this flamboyance of bling originating from the streets and underground culture (Miller, 2011), it is a contemporary recalling of heritage, culture and Black-style narratives (Tulloch, 2010). A manifestation of ancestral 'reincarnation' through dress is seen in how Black people have consistently demonstrated luxury on their bodies. Although this perspective may appear to echo essentialist paradigms, this thesis argues that the ostentation and flamboyance visible in rap music today are not merely stylistic preferences, but rather part of what I conceptualise as Black cultural DNA: a framework rooted in African historical, aesthetic, and diasporic continuity. Essentialism posits that identities such as race or culture contain inherent, stable characteristics (Appiah, 1992). While such views are often critiqued for being reductive or ahistorical, especially within cultural studies that favour fluid, constructed identities (Hall, 1996), this thesis proposes that reclaiming certain 'essential' traits can be empowering for people of African descent. As Grosfoguel (2007) cautions, rigid essentialist discourses may erase hybridity and social context. However, in the context of Afro-diasporic cultural expression, essentialist frameworks can also serve to affirm a trans-historical cultural lineage that persists despite colonial erasure.

The mobilisation of essentialist logics, particularly within cultural expressions like music and dress, may strengthen a shared African identity, amplify Pan-African solidarity and reinforce collective dignity and self-worth (Asante, 1988). Asante's Afrocentric paradigm calls for a reorientation towards African values, aesthetics, and philosophical principles, positioning Black people as agents of their own cultural narratives. This thesis embraces this stance, suggesting that the preservation and adaptation of flamboyant styles in dress, particularly as seen in performance, music videos and stage personas among Black rap artists, are not arbitrary, but constitute a conscious (and at times subconscious) reaffirmation of African cultural inheritance. As Eicher and Ross (1995) note, dress has historically functioned as a form of communication and identity in African societies, while Asante (1987; 2008) argues that expressive aesthetics such as bodily adornment, clothing and performance are central to an Afrocentric cultural system. Thus, by centring what may be read as 'essentialist' attributes, such as rhythmicity (Gilroy, 1993), expressive dress (Mercer, 1994), or orality (Rose, 1994), this thesis offers a corrective to narratives that view Black cultural identity as wholly fragmented by colonial modernity.

These attributes are better understood not as fixed traits but as enduring cultural strategies of resistance and self-definition.

The particular essentialist notion advanced within my research is that Black people, across diasporic lines, often engage with dress in ways that are expressive, flamboyant and symbolically loaded. This resonates with the often repeated and controversial cultural assumption that "all Black people have rhythm"; a phrase that has been historically weaponised, yet also reflects deep-seated, culturally transmitted forms of embodied knowledge and performance (Gottschild, 2003). In UK rap, while the dominant aesthetic is often understated (as discussed in the later sections of this literature review and empirical chapters), and exemplified by the ubiquity of the tracksuit, this under-statedness is frequently offset by conspicuous displays of jewellery and other accessories. These practices can be read as the fusion of street-level sartorial sensibility with deeper essentialist traditions of Black visual adornment, cultural pride and style narratives (Tulloch, 2010).

It is critical to acknowledge that these stylistic expressions are not received without tension. The blending of flamboyant dress codes with urban wear within UK rap culture may inadvertently reinforce negative essentialist stereotypes, particularly those that associate Blackness with excess, deviance, or irrationality (hooks, 1992; Mercer, 1994; McLeod, 1999; Entwistle, 2000; Quinn, 2005). Mandalaywala *et al*. (2017) argue that essentialist thinking often underpins social hierarchies by legitimising racialised inequalities and reducing complex identities to fixed characteristics. Nonetheless, I propose that reclaiming select essentialist traits, such as flamboyance in fashion, can subvert this logic when they are used intentionally to challenge hegemonic norms, redefine beauty, and assert cultural pride. Sociologically, essentialism can function destructively when it serves to flatten differences and naturalise social inequalities (Morning, 2007). For instance, race essentialism: Viewing racial groups as biologically and psychologically uniform, has been widely critiqued (Medin and Ortony, 1989; Pauker *et al*., 2016). Yet, if re-appropriated critically, essentialism may also function as a lens for analysing recurring patterns in Afro-diasporic expression. In this sense, I propose that essentialist interpretations of Black dress in rap culture can illuminate underlying continuities between pre-colonial African aesthetics and contemporary Black cultural identity.

Asante's (1988) African cultural system arguably engages in a form of productive essentialism. His Afrocentric model assumes that African-descended people possess core cultural traits, including an emphasis on rhythm, collectivity, oral tradition and visual expressiveness; that survive through cultural transmission despite systemic efforts to erase them. Pan-Africanism, as it appears in Asante's (1988)

work, affirms the ideological and aesthetic continuities between Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. This thesis draws on that continuity by tracing the parallels between traditional African dress practices and the sartorial language of rap artists, particularly in their symbolic use of jewellery and accessories. In turn, UK rap artists become cultural agents who re-inscribe these essentialist aesthetics in new terrains, using fashion to articulate postcolonial Black identities (Hebdige, 1979) within Britain. Even where colonial histories have fractured linguistic or religious traditions, sartorial and sonic expressions continue to carry the residues of African heritage. As such, the dress practices of UK rappers are not merely fashionable statements, but complex performances of identity, memory and resistance that draw on what I argue to be an enduring and ever-evolving Afro-diasporic aesthetic.

While essentialism in the abstract is often rejected for its political implications (Hall, 1996), in this thesis, it becomes a valuable analytical tool to acknowledge cultural continuity and the negotiation of identity through fashion and music. Rather than a rigid or exclusionary framework, I treat essentialism here as a provisional interpretive device: One that helps surface the persistent patterns and logics underpinning Afro-diasporic cultural expression. Culture, I argue, can retain core expressive values even as it adapts to new social, political, regional and technological contexts. In the intersection of rap and luxury fashion, this is especially apparent. Artists hybridise traditional African and Caribbean signifiers with contemporary brand aesthetics, using dress as both a cultural marker and commercial strategy (Hebdige, 1979; Quinn, 2004; Tulloch, 2010; Miller, 2011). In this research, essentialism helps explain how Black British rap artists deliberately or unconsciously draw on aspects of African heritage as part of their personal style and artistic identity. It is through these threads of rhythm, style, performance, luxury and resistance, that we see Black cultural DNA not as a myth or cliché, but an approach to recognising the deep-rooted and persistent threads of Black cultural expression that continue to shape UK rap and are a living, adaptive legacy passed down, reinterpreted, and remade across generations.

2.4.1 Rap music and luxury brands

To understand how UK rap intersects with luxury fashion brands, we must understand how its precursor, US rap, has related with luxury fashion brands; here, we can find unique traits in the UK rap context which have been minimally explored. This subsection shifts the focus from rather ‘essentialist’ notions of rap music’s relationship with luxury fashion and the focus on the concept of luxury, and the understanding of how Black people have interacted with luxury historically; to now discussing luxury brands. American hip-hop style and fashion have been established as a fusion of street and luxury

brands (Lewis, 2004). Romero (2012) shares a depth of hip-hop and fashion's interplay, and highlights that the epitome of this fusion was seen during the eighties, when Dapper Dan, also known as the counterfeit king, became the A-list designer for the streets. Through his finesse in buying big luxury branded bags to use as trimming on denim, he then used materials with the Gucci, Louis Vuitton, MCM, and Chanel logos to create entire ensembles for rap artists (Romero, 2012, pp. 83–85). However, his work responded to the fact that no 'authentic' luxury brand was offered to rap artists (ibid.), or what can be interpreted as luxury brands simply by not wanting to dress Black rap artists. At the time, the luxury brand designers were not offering shirts or jackets littered with their logos; it was an innovation of Dapper Dan's (Romero, 2012, p.85). Just as most major corporations in the 1980s lacked the propensity, knowledge, or expertise to engage with rap music (Negus, 1990, p. 90), luxury brands were no different (Romero, 2012). Dapper Dan's tailoring catered to the streets might be seen as analogous to the smaller record labels of that era, which were often established by African American men and were in touch with the streets (Negus, 1990, p. 90). In the nineties, luxury began to solidify its presence in US rap (Romero, 2012). We can now underline that the early facets of the US rap and luxury fashion interplay involved hip-hop and street culture, arrogating luxury brands to suit their identity and style narratives (Tulloch, 2010) while giving luxury brands street credibility (Miller, 2011). At the time, luxury brands may not have realised they would later need this credibility.

Today, luxury brands need rap artists to stay relevant. Luxury brands' heritage is utmost (Cooper *et al*., 2015) because they must embody a rich history while remaining current enough for the contemporary world and youth, who place a lot of importance on rap music (Harper *et al*., 2007; Cabalquinto, 2020; Payne, 2022). Heritage gives luxury brands depth, authenticity (Roux, 2009), and legitimacy, strengthening brand loyalty and the readiness to pay more for their products (Wiedmann *et al*., 2012). However, more than heritage is needed to provide luxury brands with street credibility (Miller, 2011) and coolness (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023) to help them remain significant in an ever-changing world of trends. Rap music has done just that, by virtue of its cultural influence. It aids in brands that have existed for decades to endure as aspirational, especially for working-class communities.

Part of the cultural power that rap music has, is that it will always be the voice of the streets and their aspirations. It is well acknowledged that luxury brands disproportionately focus on the impoverished than on the elite class in the present day (Zhang *et al*., 2022). Luxury fashion is an alluring indulgence that represents social standing, prestige, and money (Goor *et al*., 2020). Nevertheless, the current demographic of luxury consumers has expanded beyond the wealthy and includes a larger number of

young and diverse individuals (Dhaliwal *et al*., 2020). The target demographic consists of those who choose to incur debt to buy luxury products (Zhang *et al*., 2022). Social media has facilitated the accessibility of luxury products to younger demographics (Creevey *et al*., 2021); rap artists influence a significant portion of these groups because they symbolise coolness (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023). Hence, luxury brands employ celebrity endorsement as a strategic tool for neuro-marketing (Ghaedi and Izadi, 2023). I have yet to find work with academics discussing the effects of neuro-marketing on the rap and luxury fashion relationship. Linking knowledge of psychology and neuroscience to marketing (Gurgu *et al*., 2020), neuro-marketing is an emotional connection tool (Vences *et al*., 2020) which helps marketers understand how the human brain is affected by advertising and marketing techniques (Lee *et al*., 2007). The link between celebrity endorsement and neuromarketing can be understood through McCracken's (1986, 1989) meaning transfer model (Pelau *et al*., 2022). McCracken argues that endorsement works by transferring symbolic meaning from the celebrity to the product, and subsequently from the product to the consumer. The model highlights how celebrities carry culturally constructed meanings, which are then associated with the endorsed product and ultimately internalised by consumers. Therefore, by virtue of rap artists' symbolic aspects, luxury brands have cultivated a strong connection with rappers.

Through the priming stimulus in celebrity endorsement, luxury brands capitalise on a celebrity's lifestyle, due to their impact on customer perceptions. Rappers shape brand preferences and the propensity of their target audience to purchase those products (Nagar, 2021). Priming in the context of celebrity endorsement within the rap and luxury brand relationship is when consumers' attitudes towards a brand are influenced by their perception of a rapper's lifestyle. The study conducted by Nagar (2021) revealed that consumers exposed to a celebrity with a luxurious way of life were more inclined to develop a favourable attitude towards the brand and exhibit higher levels of spending when the celebrity employed a persuasive style that emphasised spending money. While I contend that the prevailing concepts of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) that rap music is linked to (Miller, 2011; Podoshen *et al*., 2014) are often overused in academic discourse, Nagar's (2021) research demonstrates how the luxury fashion sector strategically leverages the extravagant appeal of rap music as a priming tool through its connections with rap artists. Nevertheless, Chapter Five of my thesis illustrates that the symbolic properties of UK rappers concerning celebrity endorsement of luxury brands are mostly related to their identity and personas rather than conspicuousness.

Celebrity endorsement is where we can underscore the potency of Black cultural currency and resources, mainly through rap music, within the realm of luxury fashion. Rap artists have immense

cultural influence on different class and racial groups (Kitwana, 2005) and dominate popular culture (Chang, 2005; Kitwana, 2005; Dyson, 2007). 'Some' rap artists possess symbolic qualities that are deeply ingrained in the perception of coolness (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023), street credibility (Miller, 2011, p. 119; Romero, 2012, p. 38), and authenticity (Williams, 2007, p. 2; Bramwell, 2011, p. 248) among the youth at large, particularly Gen-Z and Millennial groups (Cabalquinto, 2020). Although Cabalquinto's (2020) young research participants highlight that authenticity is sometimes lost in a partnership between a rapper and a luxury brand because of the rapper's thirst for clout. However, that is not the case for all rap artists. For Black working-class luxury consumers or aspirants specifically, I contend that the symbolic properties of rap artists are rooted in the resonance of aspirational capital and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), in addition to the previously mentioned properties. Celebrity endorsement by Black rappers for White-owned luxury fashion brands is paradoxical; as Pantin-Sohier *et al*. (2023) state, rap artists and luxury brands seem to be "conflicting alliances". On one hand, there are exploitative connotations (Miller, 2011). On the other hand, Black people occupying luxury brand campaigns for instance (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023) demonstrate navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) and what I propose to be forms of contemporary decolonisation of brand image and heritage. It is also a spectacle that prestigious luxury brands require Black rap artists from the working-class communities they once opted to disassociate themselves with (Romero, 2012) to maintain their relevance. It is a phenomenon that reflects the trickle-up theory or status float phenomenon, which refers to the upward movement of innovative influence and impact from lower socio-economic groups to higher status levels (Blumberg, 1970); in this instance, brands.

Today, there are deeper meanings, influences and motives in the intertwining with and utilising of luxury brands in regard to UK rap artists. I lean towards Tulloch (1992) and Gilroy (1993), who pour into the significance that music and dress play in establishing a platform for the expression of cultural identities (Tulloch 1992; Gilroy 1993). I approach the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands from a perspective of identity and authenticity being paramount to status and conspicuousness and move away from commodification being the core of this intersection. Instead, I question where we can see Black British cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) within the said interplay, shifting the focus to how it serves as contemporary forms of decolonisation rather than focusing primarily on exploitation (Miller, 2011, p. 119), to investigate and conclude the ways in which the luxury sector directly or indirectly benefits from UK rap.

2.4.2 Luxury fashion: Status and social mobility

Academics choose to focus on status being the main goal for rap artists when wearing luxury brands (Rose, 2008, p. 133-149; Miller, 2011, p. 117). I mentioned that Miller (2011) pointed out that Veblen's (1899) conspicuous consumption concept focused on the bourgeois groups, which is not the same conspicuous consumption seen in rap music. As I stated earlier, I concur and find it unfitting to use a concept that was created by a White man in the 19th century, a time when Black people would have never been expected to own anything luxurious, to analyse how Black working-class rap artists today utilise luxury fashion. While luxury goods and practices are used to exert social status (Veblen, 1899) and are deeply tied to social distinction and class dynamics (Simmel, 1904), I propose that luxury brands are tools to affirm social mobility for UK rap artists from working-class groups, rather than purely assertions of wealth, power and social status as the case with the elite groups (Veblen, 1899). There are subtle differences between status and social mobility. It is my contention that luxury labels symbolise the transitions between social classes for accomplished UK rap artists, resulting in the attainment of status, which denotes an individual's social place within a hierarchical structure determined by prestige, honour, or social value (Weber, 1978).

Social mobility is the process by which individuals or groups move within a social hierarchy, usually quantified by changes in monetary, educational, or occupational status, which can be detected within the general aspirational connotations of rap music and 'making it out the hood'. Social mobility can manifest as either vertical (upward or downward) or horizontal (moving within the same social strata without any alteration in one's social standing). Upward mobility is the process of advancing to a higher socioeconomic level, typically achieved by education, increased money, or securing a recognised profession. Intergenerational mobility refers to comparing people's social class with that of their parents, indicating whether individuals are in a better or worse position than the preceding generation. The concept of intra-generational mobility refers to the tracking of an individual's movement throughout the social hierarchy over their own lifespan (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1980). Therefore, I contend that instead of concentrating on status, it is essential to examine how Afro-diasporic UK rappers utilise their cultural wealth through music, as a means of social mobility, with associations with luxury brands serving as a medium for signalling the attainment of such mobility. Thereafter, status is achieved. Social mobility serves as an avenue to attain status; luxury fashion brands are the tools in doing so.

2.5 Liberalism and neoliberalism

A discussion of liberalism and neoliberalism is essential in this thesis, particularly because they relate to the socio-economic conditions that frame UK rap and its cultural expressions. Liberalism, with its foundational emphasis on individual rights, freedom, and property ownership, laid the ideological groundwork for Western capitalist democracies (Gray, 1995; Foucault, 2008). However, the neoliberal turn from the late 20th century onward has reconfigured liberal ideals, shifting the role of the state from provider of welfare to enabler of markets (Harvey, 2005; Brown, 2015). Neoliberalism privileges competition, entrepreneurial subjectivities, and the commodification of all life spheres, including culture and identity (Ong, 2006). As such, the neoliberal landscape is not merely economic but profoundly cultural, shaping how marginalised communities engage with social mobility, self-presentation, and representation (Gill and Scharff, 2011; Banet-Weiser, 2012).

The rise of neoliberal multiculturalism (Goldberg, 2009) in the UK provides a crucial context for understanding the commercial and symbolic role of Black British cultural production because it frames diversity as a marketable asset while disavowing the structural inequalities faced by racialised communities (Hall, 2000, pp. 209-249; Goldberg, 2009; Noxolo, 2017 Nox). Within this context, Black cultural expression such as UK rap is simultaneously commodified and depoliticised; celebrated for its aesthetic contributions yet stripped of its radical and resistant potential (hooks, 1992; Gilroy, 2010, pp. 71-91; Banet-Weiser, 2018). Cultural theorists such as Gilroy (2010), in *Darker than Blue*, critique the neoliberal co-optation of Black aesthetics as a performance of inclusion without structural transformation. Gilroy warns against aestheticised antiracism, where cultural expressions of Blackness are celebrated in aesthetics and consumerism, without accompanying structural or political change. A scenario of aestheticised antiracism is when cultural recognition is evident while socio-economic injustices remain untouched; a phenomenon especially visible in the treatment of UK rap, which is often embraced for its stylistic and cultural innovations while its critiques of structural inequality are sidelined or less relevant. Within the realms of multicultural branding and advertising, cultural diversity is frequently reduced to a visual aesthetic or symbolic gesture; a box to be ticked, rather than indicating any substantive engagement with structural racism or socio-economic inequality (Gilroy, 2010). This logic is especially visible in the way luxury fashion brands collaborate with Black UK rappers, leveraging their cultural capital to boost brand image and signal urban credibility (Miller, 2011). In doing so, Blackness becomes a form of marketable currency: a 'diversity card' used to demonstrate inclusion without enacting systemic change. However, despite operating within this neoliberal framework, UK rap retains its resistant potential and capital (Francis, 2017). The genre

continues to articulate marginalised experiences, challenge dominant narratives, and express pride in Black identity. Rather than being neutralised by commercial partnerships, the political and cultural potency of UK rap persists; often coexisting with commodification in complex and contradictory ways. Gilroy's (2010) analysis is instructive here, exposing how neoliberal diversity regimes seek to aestheticise Blackness, but cannot fully contain its radical capacities when mobilised through lived experience, lyrical expression, and community resonance.

In *Darker than Blue*, Gilroy (2010) also engages the legacy of liberal humanism and its discontents, arguing that the liberal promise of equality has historically failed racialised populations. The UK's postcolonial context complicates the discourse around liberty and justice, and Gilroy highlights how British liberalism selectively incorporates Black subjects into the nation through consumption rather than citizenship. This dynamic is mirrored in the mainstreaming of UK rap, where Black artistic expression is often legitimised only insofar as it proves commercially profitable. Within this framework, UK rap is embraced for its market value rather than its socio-political depth, reducing cultural authenticity to a product for consumption (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). Gilroy's notion of the commodification of suffering, evident in the widespread fascination with trauma-centred narratives such as gang violence, poverty and marginalisation (Morgan, 2009; Quinn, 2024), underscores the double bind confronting Black British artists. They are often compelled to aestheticize or monetise their pain to gain visibility and cultural recognition. In doing so, artists may feel the pressure to translate lived oppression into palatable narratives for wider consumption, raising urgent questions about agency, authenticity and the politics of representation.

Critiques of neoliberalism often overlook how its values become internalised and normalised, a point Gilroy (2010) makes repeatedly. He explores how Black individuals are expected to exemplify neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency, innovation and resilience. Yet, Gilroy cautions against celebrating these qualities in isolation, as they obscure structural inequality and produce a myth of meritocratic success. This is particularly resonant for UK rap artists who, despite achieving visibility, remain subject to systemic exclusion in housing, education and employment (Back, 1996). Gilroy's critique resists the seductive pull of neoliberal triumphalism, urging scholars to interrogate how empowerment discourse can obscure enduring racial hierarchies because it frames individual success stories as evidence of systemic progress, while ignoring the structural conditions that continue to disadvantage the broader Black population. By celebrating visibility and market inclusion as signs of racial equity, neoliberal narratives risk masking the persistence of racialised inequality beneath a veneer of diversity. In this context, figures such as Black UK rappers may be positioned as symbols of progress, even as their

communities remain subject to socio-economic marginalisation, over-policing, and cultural misrecognition (Gilroy, 2010; Bhattacharyya, 2018). This paradox is central to understanding the role of UK rap within neoliberal Britain: Its cultural currency is both enabled and constrained by the very structures it seeks to critique.

Neoliberalism has reshaped the very logic of cultural production. Rap artists in the UK, like their US counterparts, navigate a terrain in which authenticity, visibility and commercial success are governed by market metrics and algorithmic attention (McRobbie, 2016; Pennycook, 2020). The figure of the rapper becomes emblematic of the neoliberal subject; self-reliant, entrepreneurial, and responsible for their own success or failure (Tyler, 2020). This framing obscures the structural limitations faced by young Black men in Britain (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020), masking systemic barriers under the guise of individual meritocracy. Gilroy (2010) underscores this tension, noting how neoliberal ideologies privatise risk and reward, demanding that subjects self-fashion in ways that mirror corporate logic. He warns that cultural production becomes a neoliberal hustle where survival depends on the capacity to market one's own oppression. This instrumentalisation of marginalisation risks flattening the complexity of Black cultural expression into commodified trauma, where visibility is granted not for nuanced narratives or artistic ingenuity, but for conforming to marketable scripts of Black pain; scripts that ultimately serve the interests of the very systems that Black artists, cultural producers or creatives claim to disrupt. Gilroy's warning against the "marketisation of suffering" (2010, p. 89) is central to understanding how rap artists are coerced, symbolically and economically, into performing narratives of struggle that resonate with neoliberal fantasies of resilience. Black British rappers, especially those from the UK African diaspora, often centre their lyrics on overcoming structural barriers, detailing lives shaped by austerity (O'Hara, 2014; Bhattacharyya *et al*., 2015), crime, and marginalisation (Bramwell, 2015; Ilan, 2020). These narratives, while rooted in truth, are also commodified by media and fashion outlets eager to align with Black authenticity (Miller, 2011). The symbolic capital of hardship, as Gilroy (2010) notes, is extracted, aestheticised, and circulated within neoliberal consumer culture without commitment to dismantling the systems that produce the suffering in the first place. Thus, rap becomes entangled in what Hall (1992) terms the "politics of representation," where the image of Black resistance is stripped of its political force and resold as a spectacle.

While neoliberalism encourages depoliticised forms of entrepreneurship, the lived experiences of UK African Diaspora youth expose the limitations of this ideology. As Bhattacharyya (2018) argues, neoliberal racial capitalism both invites and excludes racialised groups, offering symbolic inclusion while denying full economic and political citizenship. Gilroy (1993; 2010) highlights this contradiction

through the appropriation of Du Bois' concept of double consciousness: The tension between being visible through cultural expression yet marginalised in structural terms. The creative strategies of UK rap, such as multilingual lyricism, distinct fashion codes, and transnational influences are not merely displays of market awareness. They represent forms of cultural resistance that challenge the idea of total assimilation into neoliberal norms (Hall, 1992; Noxolo, 2017). Gilroy (2010) insists these expressions be understood not as surface-level aesthetics, but as deeply rooted responses to historical and ongoing exclusion. Rather than viewing these conditions as merely restrictive, scholars such as Rose (2008) and Banet-Weiser (2018) encourage us to consider how neoliberalism produces new modalities of agency. UK rap artists often reframe their hustle and visibility as a kind of strategic navigation of both liberal ideals of freedom and neoliberal pressures for self-commodification. This ambivalence; simultaneously empowering and exploitative; is central to understanding the lived experiences of Black British youth in the 21st century because it reveals how cultural actors must constantly negotiate visibility, authenticity and legitimacy within a system that offers recognition only through market participation (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2017; Littler, 2018). These negotiations reflect the broader logic of neoliberal racial capitalism, which Bhattacharyya (2018) argues both invites and excludes racialised subjects from full participation in economic citizenship. Within this landscape, Black British youth; particularly rappers, are expected to convert personal pain and cultural heritage into marketable commodities, aligning with what Gilroy (2010) critiques as the commodification of suffering. This is especially visible in the cultural economy of UK rap, where authenticity is valorised but only when it can be capitalised upon (Speers, 2017; Fatsis, 2019). Yet, even as these dynamics reinforce structural exclusions, they also demonstrate how Black youth transform systemic constraints into forms of symbolic and material power; aligning with Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model. Through linguistic, resistant, and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), UK rap artists not only assert their place within national narratives but also contest the limits of inclusion defined by neoliberalism (Rose, 1994; Noxolo, 2017; Bramwell, 2015). However, as Hall (1996) reminds us, cultural expressions remain susceptible to appropriation and commodification when detached from their political origins. Thus, while UK rap offers powerful interventions into questions of race, class and identity, it remains entangled in the very structures it seeks to subvert. Gilroy's (2010) exploration of Black expressive culture as both a site of contestation and complicity is particularly relevant here; it demonstrates how Black British artists strategically navigate dominant systems of value without fully surrendering their cultural agency.

Neoliberalism's seductive language of autonomy and success resonates with UK Afro-diasporic youth, especially in contexts where institutional support has been withdrawn. As Adkins (2018) points out,

neoliberal governance reshapes subjectivity through the moral imperative to 'invest' in oneself as an enterprise. Rappers who build personal brands, collaborate with luxury houses, or launch fashion ventures may appear to epitomise this model. Yet such moves, while entrepreneurial, can also be read as acts of survival within systems that deny other forms of capital accumulation (Tyler, 2020). The adoption of luxury as a marker of status by UK rap artists cannot be understood merely as materialism, but as a deeply racialised response to the exclusion from conventional forms of middle-class respectability (Puwar, 2004; Gill, 2017). Here, the neoliberal subjectivity imposed on Black artists is unstable, fractured by histories of colonialism, diaspora, and class stratification; realities Gilroy (2010) insists must remain foregrounded.

Crucially, Gilroy (2010) also calls for a reorientation of political imagination beyond the limits of neoliberal multiculturalism. He critiques how liberal societies use culture to simulate progress while deflecting from economic and structural violence. The UK rap's relationship with luxury fashion brands embodies this contradiction. Rappers are invited into high fashion spaces as cultural tastemakers but not as decision-makers or beneficiaries of long-term equity. The circulation of Black cultural capital benefits fashion houses more than the communities from which that capital originates (Miller, 2011; Warren *et al*., 2019). Gilroy challenges this asymmetry by demanding that culture should not be severed from politics. His vision insists that the aesthetic dimensions of Black cultural production must be linked to broader emancipatory projects and historical reckonings. In this way, UK rap is not only a site of commercial exchange but of potential decolonial knowledge.

It is also important to acknowledge the proponents of liberalism and neoliberalism who argue for their potential to empower marginalised groups through market participation and free expression (Sen, 1999; Friedman, 2002). However, these perspectives often fail to engage with the racialised exclusions that are structurally embedded in liberal democratic societies (Goldberg, 2009). Gilroy (2010) addresses this directly, noting that liberal discourses of freedom and opportunity are built on colonial amnesia and the erasure of Black histories. His work encourages us to rethink freedom, not as personal choice or economic success, but as a shared, historically rooted call for justice. *Darker than Blue*, therefore, functions not only as a powerful critique of neoliberalism but also as a call to imagine new forms of politics, grounded in the historical memory of the African diaspora, collective solidarity across Black communities, and practices of cultural and political resistance.

In sum, discussing liberalism and neoliberalism in this literature review helps explain the economic and ideological landscape that shapes UK rap. Black British cultural actors, particularly those from the

UK African diaspora, do not simply absorb these dominant ideas; they respond to them creatively and critically through lyrics, fashion and performance. Their work is not just a reaction, but a powerful expression of Black identity used to survive and resist in today's neoliberal climate (Puwar, 2004; Gill, 2017). Gilroy's *Darker than Blue* (2010) remains central to this analysis, offering a vital outline to explore how race and capitalism intersect in modern Britain. His insights are essential for developing a historically grounded understanding of how Black British cultural expression engages with and pushes back against liberal capitalist systems.

Finally, as the UK still grapples with its post-Brexit identity and deepening social inequality, Gilroy's (2010) critique of liberalism becomes increasingly prescient. He warns against a political climate in which 'diversity' is performed in the marketplace while racial injustice remains unaddressed by the state (Gilroy, 2010, p. 102). For Black British rap artists, this means being recognised only as entrepreneurs, not as critics or revolutionaries. Within this matrix, UK rap becomes both a tool and a terrain; employed to uplift, but also surveilled. Gilroy's work, in dialogue with critiques from Hall (1996), Brown (2015) and Bhattacharyya (2018) reveals the necessity of interpreting cultural expression not as a by-product of neoliberalism but as a mode of struggle and survival within it. By linking Gilroy's perspective with UK rap and luxury fashion, this thesis argues that culture under neoliberalism should be understood not just as a form of representation, but as a site of resistance, learning and political memory.

Conclusion:

This chapter maps the theoretical terrain necessary for understanding UK rap's entanglement with fashion, heritage, and politics. It demonstrates how hip hop studies, diaspora scholarship and critiques of neoliberalism illuminate UK rap not simply as cultural entertainment, but as a site where struggle, aspiration and resistance are transformed into meaning and cultural value. By foregrounding Pan-Africanist perspectives and contextualising Black relationships with fashion, it disrupts shallow readings of luxury in rap culture and reframes it as an ongoing negotiation of identity and power. These insights create a foundation for Chapter Three, which builds on this groundwork by examining the cultural mechanisms through which UK rap expresses and sustains its value, and introduces the conceptual framework for this thesis.

Chapter Three: Literature review part two

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Three continues the literature review by refining the conceptual frame of the thesis. It begins with Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework, a model that challenges deficit-based views of marginalised communities by highlighting forms of capital – aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, resistant, and navigational – that exist outside Eurocentric definitions of value. Applying CCW to UK rap foregrounds the genre as a generator of cultural wealth, where lyrics, aesthetics, and style function as archives of diasporic knowledge and survival.

The chapter then moves to the symbolic and lyrical dimensions of rap, showing how meaning is encoded in words and brand references. The chapter then explores gendered perspectives, examining how Black masculinity and femininity are negotiated through consumption, performance, and self-presentation, and how these negotiations complicate and resist dominant cultural narratives. The chapter also examines UK rap's subcultural fashion identity – particularly the tracksuit – tracing how style becomes both a signifier of authenticity and a tool of cultural storytelling.

Finally, this chapter interrogates the largely overlooked role of the stylist. Far from being a neutral intermediary, the stylist is framed as a cultural worker who mediates between commercial expectations and the artist's identity. Their role in shaping visual narratives underscores the extent to which fashion in UK rap is never merely decorative, but deeply embedded in the politics of representation and cultural preservation. The chapter concludes with a dedicated section delineating the conceptual framework for this thesis

3.2 Exploring UK rap through community cultural wealth

I have struggled to identify a suitable framework to measure the cultural wealth and currency of the UK African diaspora within existing scholarly work on the rap music interplay with luxury fashion brands. As stated in the previous section, this thesis turns away from the Bourdieusian cultural capital approach that academics have referred to concerning rap (Miyakawa, 2000; Kitwana, 2000; Turner, 2019). Indeed, Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital model acknowledges social inequality and its manifestations across various social domains. He also illuminates the role of non-economic resources, such as social skills and cultural knowledge, and how those facilitate social mobility, status, and the navigation of social spaces; as well as the maintenance or enhancement of one's social position. However, his concepts fail to recognise the distinct experiences of Black people in comparison to White people, particularly concerning racism and its intersections with other forms of relegation (Bell, 1986; 1998; Essed, 1991; Baca Zinn, 1989). Bourdieu's (1977; 1984) concept of cultural capital is limited in scope. His theory is defined by a focus on White middle-class values, which stand in contrast to the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005), understood as a disenfranchised individual's collection of cultural assets and resources. Bourdieu's (1977; 1984) concept of cultural capital is incompatible with my research, contrary to US rap studies finding this framework fitting.

This thesis, therefore, draws on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, which she has used in educational studies for students of colour. Although she focuses primarily on Latino students, I employ her theory for members of the UK African diaspora concerning UK rap. Yosso's (2005) theory can aid in Afro-diasporic empowerment. Existing forms of knowledge have been employed to suppress, marginalise, and imperceptibly obscure the experiences of Black individuals (Yosso, 2005). "Outsider" (Collins, 1986) and transgressive knowledge (hooks, 1994) through the establishment of UK rap as a potent cultural currency can empower marginalised groups and convert experiences of marginalisation to transformative resistance and cultural expressions (Gilroy, 1987; hooks, 1990; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). Anzaldúa (1990) states that people of colour can transform the process of theorising; thus, by applying the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005) in my research, members of the UK African diaspora can aid in advancing knowledge of how Black rappers generate and preserve UK rap through heritage, community and authenticity, and challenge stereotypical conceptions of rap music being an art form of delinquency (Tanner *et al*., 2009), whilst appreciating Black people's voices.

Yosso's model is grounded in the critical race theory (CRT) (Bell, 1986; Delgado, 1988; Crenshaw *et al*., 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Crenshaw, 2002), which recognises the complicated formations of racialised subjection centred on immigration status and class (Crenshaw, 1989; 1993), which are factors that Black British people face (Gilroy, 1987). CRT focuses on the experiences of individuals belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups within a critical historical framework and unveils the presence of accumulated assets and resources within Black communities' histories and collective experiences (Yosso, 2005). CRT acknowledges that communities of colour effectively cultivate cultural wealth by utilising six forms of capital: resistant, aspirational, familial, linguistic, social and navigational capital (Delgado Bernal, 1997; 2001; Auerbach, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Orellana, 2003; Yosso, 2005). However, in Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, these forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or fixed. Instead, they embody a fluid nature by which they can intertwine and support each other (Yosso, 2005).

Resistant capital serves as a framework for examining how Black UK rappers demonstrate resistance or oppositional attitudes to luxury brands through their lyrics. This form of capital pertains to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are developed and fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality (Freire, 1970; 1973; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). Beyond lyrical content alone, resistant capital within UK rap culture must be understood as a form of insurgent aesthetics; a concept that captures the refusal to conform to dominant systems of value through creative expression (Duncum, 2002). UK rappers' selective appropriation, ironic reworking, or outright rejection of luxury fashion tropes, functions as a counter-hegemonic strategy, echoing Hebdige's (1979) foundational work on subcultural style as resistance through signification. This form of capital extends into visual culture; music videos, social media campaigns, and street wear collaborations become arenas of symbolic warfare, where artists can invert the gaze and critique luxury brands from within (Mercer, 1994; hooks, 1995; Entwistle, 2000). These cultural productions challenge dominant narratives by asserting alternative modes of Black subjectivity, aesthetic authorship, and aspirational identity (Gilroy, 2002; Rose, 2008). Resistant capital, then, is not simply oppositional; it is constructive, generating alternative value systems and communities of meaning (Yosso, 2005). It situates Black Britishness as a site of creativity and agency rather than deficit, disrupting dominant aesthetic systems and expanding the political function of style (Eshun, 2003; Osgerby, 2014; Mowatt, French and Malebranche, 2013; Kutzbach and Mueller, 2016). Inparticular, CCW offers insight into the re-symbolisation of class through style and visibility. When UK rappers appropriate luxury items or brand imagery, they are not simply mimicking high-status

consumption but are reconfiguring meanings through what Yosso (2005) terms resistant capital. This act challenges the white supremacist underpinnings of both high fashion and traditional pathways to prestige (Craig, 2002; Quinn, 2005). For instance, the very act of wearing brands such as Burberry or Louis Vuitton while referencing estates, immigration raids, or stop-and-search reflects what Back (1996) might call a subcultural semiotic rebellion. These are not merely fashion choices; they are political acts that expose the contradictions between material exclusion and cultural appropriation. Resistant capital here becomes performative and aesthetic, functioning in lyrics and looks as a critique of systems that historically denied Black presence in luxury spaces.

Aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) can be employed to examine how UK rap artists, hailing from working-class backgrounds, have aspired for possibilities beyond their current circumstances, often lacking the tangible resources necessary to achieve their objectives and aspirations. This aspect of capital refers to the capacity to sustain aspirations and ambitions for the future despite obstacles related to socioeconomic challenges or racial barriers. Aspirational capital is therefore deployed to understand better how those hopes, dreams and goals intersect with the use of luxury brand names in UK rap lyrics and how aspirational capital is evident in the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay. Rap music has been interconnected with aspirational motives (Krims, 2000). The interconnection of aspirations, whether motivated by materialistic or social aspects, has been noted within hip-hop studies. Caliendo and McIlwain (2010) point out that, aspirations are voiced through hip-hop aesthetics by marginalized African American and Caribbean youth. Rap music is not only a tool to voice frustrations but also to voice aspirations. Hadley's (2012) book *Therapeutic Uses of Rap and Hip Hop* indicates that communicating aspirations through lyrics can be a form of therapy for marginalised youth from ethnic minority groups. The indications of rap music being a collective expression of future aspirations and a platform in which marginalised people can essentially dream out loud as they voice their aspirations through rapping is represented (Rabaka, 2013) within the concept of aspirational capital. Aspirations communicated through rap music can double as a form of understanding what different generational groups and demographics aspire to gain and possess within a society, showing the importance of varied aspirational motives. Bramwell (2015) highlights that rap music in the UK, both as a listener and as a rap artist, has the power to cultivate and develop the means to achieve economic and social aspirations, which result in building self-esteem in a society that is founded within inequality for certain groups of people. Bramwell's argument supports the notion that communicating aspirations through rap music is therapeutic, which I consider to have a positive social impact on young members of the UK African diaspora.

Aspirational capital is contagious. Aspirations of Black working-class youth can be influenced or inspired by rappers who come from working-class backgrounds. The mentioning of certain aspirations, or having attained aspirations, in lyrics, can make aspirations seem attainable for listeners with similar backgrounds. These lyrics that mention luxury brand names are the meeting points at which UK rap and luxury fashion intersect outside of their respective industries. Facchineti (2010) uses UK rap as an example and states that the adoption of linguistic variants within UK rap could be a result of conscious fluctuating between various ethnic, generational and class issues that are correlated to personal aspirations. Moreover, building aspirational capital by a rapper leads to attaining their goals and aspirations, facilitating upward social and intergenerational mobility. As mentioned, intergenerational mobility refers to changes in an individual or household's social standing compared to preceding generations (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2019), particularly between parents and adult children (Torche, 2015).

Aspirational capital must also be read through the lens of speculative futurity: a framework that explores how marginalised groups imagine and enact alternative futures against structural constraints (Muñoz, 2009). In UK rap, aspirations are not merely economic; they articulate imaginative possibilities of freedom, visibility, and self-definition outside institutional norms (Gilroy, 2002; Eshun, 2003). The practice of naming high-end fashion brands in lyrics functions as a semiotic practice that reframes luxury not simply as conspicuous consumption but as a metaphor for self-worth and legitimacy in a context where traditional pathways to recognition are obstructed (hooks, 1995; Tulloch and Jenkins, 2013). Moreover, aspirational capital in UK rap gestures toward collective uplift; when one artist gains access to symbolic or material capital, their visibility becomes aspirational material for entire communities (Yosso, 2005; Nnorom, 2021). In this way, aspirational capital fosters a cultural pipeline through which social transformation is imagined and, in some cases, enacted; signalling a reconfiguration of prestige, mobility, and futurity within Black British expressive culture (Oswin, 2018; Miller, 2020). Furthermore, aspirational capital in the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay becomes not only personal but generational. The inter-generational impact of visible success in a historically disenfranchised community cannot be underestimated. Aspirational capital, according to Yosso (2005), is “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future” despite structural inequality (p. 78). In a British context where African and Caribbean youth are disproportionately excluded from educational and economic opportunity (Gillborn, 2008; Andrews, 2016), the visibility of rappers in luxury campaigns challenges dominant narratives of Black stagnation. It also facilitates what Gilroy (2005) would describe as diasporic imagination; hope rooted in communal history and struggle.

Aspirational capital in this sense becomes a shared resource; its articulation in music and fashion gestures toward new models of success beyond assimilation or exceptionalism.

Familial capital (Yosso, 2005) instils a deep awareness of heritage and clarifies the conflict of double consciousness that Du Bois (1903) and Gilroy (1993) discuss. This form of capital pertains to cultural knowledge cultivated within the familial context, encompassing a sense of cultural intuition and community history (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002). I view familial capital as a catalyst for a decolonised consciousness (Fanon, 1952; Thiong'o, 1989). It provides a 'sanctuary' for a psychological break from colonial mentalities, where the colonised reject the coloniser's internalised beliefs and reassert their cultural identity because cultural knowledge is the core of familial capital (Yosso, 2005). This form of cultural wealth also underscores the importance of community connections, broadening the notion of family. Familial capital in the context of UK rap extends beyond traditional kinship ties to encompass memory work and affective heritage; the transmission of emotional, cultural, and survival knowledge across generations (Boym, 2001; Gilroy, 2002). It can encapsulate how stories, wisdom and tactics of endurance are passed down orally or through embodied cultural practice and embedded in music. This intergenerational capital often surfaces as sampled voices, dedications, or intertextual references that blur the boundaries between the personal and the political (Rose, 1994; Perry, 2004). Such practices contribute to what Muñoz (2009) terms "ephemera as evidence": the idea that minor gestures, fragments, and fleeting expressions can carry the weight of diasporic memory, struggle, and joy. In UK rap, familial capital becomes audible as a sonic archive, where Black British identity, remembrance, and resistance are not only preserved but also reimagined through sound (Campt, 2017; Nnorom, 2021).

Many rappers from working-class backgrounds find a strong sense of community in the council housing estates they grew up in (Barron, 2013; Bramwell, 2015; Adams, 2018; Beswick, 2019). Within the community, linguistic capital is fostered, which involves communication experiences in diverse languages or styles that contribute to developing intellectual and social skills (Orellana, 2003). This aspect of cultural wealth underlines the connections between language and racialised cultural history (Cummins, 1986; Anzaldúa, 1987; Darder, 1991; García and Baker, 1995; Gutierrez, 2002), which Gilroy (1993, p. 103) recognised in hip-hop music as a cross-fertilisation of vernacular cultures. Linguistic capital includes storytelling skills (Yosso, 2005); rapping is rhymed storytelling (Rose, 1994, p. 2). As mentioned earlier, Bramwell (2011, p. 10) also refers to rap as a linguistic art form. Yosso (2005) posits that linguistic capital includes the ability to communicate through music and poetry and includes rhythm, dramatic pauses, rhymes, facial effect, vocal tone, memorisation, attention to detail and

comedic timing, which I argue all co-exist within UK rap. UK rappers exhibit traits of linguistic capital as they rap about luxury brands and experiences that intersect with other forms of cultural wealth. Storytelling can provoke resistance, foster empowerment, and facilitate the process of reconstructing one's identity in the post-colonial era (Fanon, 1961), which, through UK rap, I deem to stimulate the decolonisation of the mind (Thiong'o, 1986). Thus, social change and facets of liberation are potent when cultural storytelling is enforced within Black communities. Linguistic capital within UK rap is more than code-switching or multilingual fluency; it is the performative mastery of a glocal lexicon that resonates across both local and diasporic audiences (Appadurai, 1996; Pennycook, 2007). Through complex interplays of slang and diasporic inflections, UK rappers construct linguistic worlds that simultaneously signal belonging and resistance (Gilroy, 2002; Hewitt, 2003). This linguistic innovation often disrupts legibility to mainstream audiences, functioning as both a protective mechanism and a form of cultural gatekeeping (Cutler, 2003; Alim, 2006). It also unsettles colonial linguistic hierarchies by asserting the value and legitimacy of non-standard Englishes and Black vernaculars (hooks, 1994; Rampton, 2011). In this context, linguistic capital is radical: it not only communicates meaning but reclaims the terms of communication itself, asserting Black cultural expression as both valuable and sovereign (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Nnorom, 2021). Linguistic capital in UK rap goes beyond speaking multiple languages; it becomes a form of resistance. As Yosso (2005, p. 79) explains, linguistic capital includes skills like storytelling, humour, and using cultural references to navigate and challenge systems of power. In UK rap, this appears through a mix of road slang, Jamaican patois, Yoruba, Arabic, and working-class British English (Alim *et al*., 2009; Kirkham and Moore, 2016). These language choices show authenticity and act as tools for both building community and keeping outsiders at a distance (Cutler, 2003; Alim, 2006). This reflects hooks' (1990) idea of talking back, where speaking becomes a way to resist oppression and define oneself. By using these varied language styles, UK rappers challenge dominant ideas about 'correct' or 'proper' language and highlight the value of everyday, community-based knowledge (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Rampton, 2011). When luxury brands work with these artists, they are not just buying exposure; they are engaging with deep cultural meanings, histories, and street credibility (Tulloch and Jenkins, 2013; Nnorom, 2021) and benefitting from that linguistic capital when their brand names are lyrically mentioned.

UK rappers can leverage their social networks, contacts and community resources to gain exposure to luxury fashion opportunities, exemplifying social capital's power. This form of capital can be conceptualised as networks of people and community resources (Yosso, 2005). Peer and other social connections can be crucial in offering instrumental support to navigate certain institutions (Gilbert,

1982; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) for UK rappers, such as the luxury fashion industry. Social capital in the UK rap and luxury fashion brand nexus increasingly involves strategic collaborations that challenge historical exclusions from elite cultural spaces (Bourdieu, 1986; Crane, 2000). As luxury brands seek cultural credibility (Miller, 2011), UK rappers are positioned as tastemakers with embedded social capital capable of influencing consumer culture and mediating cultural legitimacy (Entwistle, 2000; Jenkins, 2006; Tulloch and Jenkins, 2013). This is not merely about access but about negotiation: UK rappers frequently bring their communities into these spaces; stylists, videographers, designers; thereby redistributing opportunity and subverting the neoliberal myth of individual meritocracy (Yosso, 2005; Littler, 2013). Furthermore, the rise of digital media has transformed how social capital operates; platforms like Instagram and TikTok have become vital for network-building and for amplifying the cultural currency of UK rap through viral content and transnational reach (Marwick, 2013; Abidin, 2016; Nnorom, 2021). Social capital thus emerges as a collective mechanism of visibility, power, and industry reconfiguration, reshaping the gatekeeping practices of both fashion and music industries from the margins inward. In UK rap, social capital also crosses over to familial capital which is evident in dedications to siblings, lost friends, single mothers, or entire estates; symbolic communities that offer emotional grounding and social meaning (refs). These invocations are not mere sentimental tropes; they anchor the artist within a social ecology that values relationality over individualism (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; hooks, 1990). As Beswick (2019) argues, working-class identities in the UK are often shaped through collective memory and shared spatial experiences, rather than isolated achievement. This resonates with Yosso's (2005) CCW model, where familial and social capital are resources embedded within networks of support, care, and knowledge transmission. Moreover, such articulations challenge neoliberal logics that frame success as a purely individual pursuit (Gill and Scharff, 2011; Littler, 2013). UK rappers instead present their achievements as extensions of community strength, memory, and survival, expressing a stance of solidarity that redefines visibility in public and commercial life (Mckenzie, 2015; Nnorom, 2021).

This sector was never designed with Black people in mind. Therefore, investigating how UK rappers have navigated this space is essential. Navigational capital pertains to the aptitude for effectively traversing through social institutions (Yosso, 2005). In the case of my thesis, such social environments constitute the luxury fashion scene. This medium of capital infers the capacity to manoeuvre through spaces not intended to include people of colour. Yet, ironically, today, the luxury industry needs Black rappers to maintain a sense of street credibility (Miller, 2011) and coolness (Warren *et al*., 2019; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023), as discussed earlier. Despite racial and socio-economic barriers, I recognise Black UK rap artists' demonstrations of resilience as "a set of inner resources" (Stanton-Salazar and

Spina, 2000, p. 229). They implement social and psychological 'critical navigational skills' (Solórzano and Villalpando, 1998) to manoeuvre through structures such as the luxury fashion sector, which they are ready to exploit (Miller, 2011). Navigational capital recognises the ability of people to act within the limitations imposed by institutional constraints, but it is also interconnected with social capital that facilitates community navigation (Williams, 1997; Yosso, 2005), which I use as a lens to examine UK rappers' relationships with luxury brand designers and creative directors and how such connections aid in the navigating of UK rappers' immersion in the luxury fashion industry. Navigational capital should not only be framed as individual adaptation to oppressive systems, but as a mode of subversive cartography, a strategy through which marginalised individuals forge and remake cultural terrains (hooks, 1990). Rappers chart new paths through spaces not designed for them, but they also redraw the cultural map. Their visibility in elite fashion spaces (Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012), editorial features (Romero, 2012), and runways (Ibid.) performs a form of spatial disruption, unsettling dominant imaginaries about who belongs in these rarefied arenas (Bourdieu, 1986; Gilroy, 2002). This navigation is tactical and often precarious, requiring a sophisticated negotiation of how to operate within the semiotic codes of luxury while resisting total assimilation (Hebdige, 1979; Entwistle, 2000; Tulloch, 2004). This navigation is not merely about inclusion but about redefinition: UK rappers' navigational capital destabilises the very architectures of fashion elitism by inserting marginalised subjectivities into its visual and symbolic core (Yosso, 2005; Miller, 2020; Nnorom, 2021). In doing so, rap artists transform navigational capital into a politicised cultural force; one that expands the map itself rather than simply securing a place on it.

Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model enables a framework for measuring the cultural currency of UK rap. The contemporary UK African diaspora produces cultural resources, emerging from or resulting in the six forms of cultural wealth articulated by Yosso (2005). How have those forms of cultural wealth impacted the integration of UK rappers into the luxury fashion scene? Yosso's framework also assists in investigating how luxury fashion brands have benefited from UK rap's cultural currency. Specifically, the social connections of UK rap artists, their adeptness at navigating the luxury sphere, and their linguistic capital; which articulate aspirational lyrics reflective of the notion of aspirational capital. These forms of cultural wealth that seep through UK rap and its interrelationship with luxury brands may impact or shape the experiences of their working-class listeners. Thus, the cultural influence I discussed earlier is rooted in the dimensions of community cultural wealth, ultimately providing indirect benefits to luxury fashion brands.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model not only critiques dominant notions of capital but also reclaims value systems rooted in marginalised cultures. Within the UK rap context, the model reveals how cultural wealth is generated within and against systems that have historically excluded or disenfranchised Black British communities. This framework challenges Bourdieu's idea of what counts as 'legitimate' capital by recognising the knowledge and value found in subcultural style, language and everyday survival. Yosso (2005, p. 69) argues that these forms of capital "reside within communities of colour," pushing back against views that place value outside of Black experiences. In a fashion industry that has long profited from Black culture while excluding Black people (Miller, 2011), CCW offers a way to understand how Black UK rappers build their own systems of value: through creativity, social mobility, and visibility.

Lastly, the cumulative force of Yosso's model becomes most powerful when seen as an interdependent matrix. The six forms of cultural capital are not fixed silos but operate in symbiosis, compounding one another's effects. In the case of UK rap and luxury fashion, aspirational lyrics are built from familial memory, delivered in linguistically rich forms, and navigated through resistant stances to exclusionary systems. These layered expressions cannot be measured by traditional sociological tools alone. As Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) argue, critical race-informed frameworks like CCW are necessary to apprehend the full depth of marginalised community knowledge. Therefore, CCW is not simply an analytical lens for assessing rapper success; it is a mode of epistemic resistance. It legitimises the knowledge created through struggle, survival, and creativity. In this thesis, Yosso's model enables a reclamation of capital from those who have historically defined it; and offers a framework through which UK rap can be understood as both cultural expression and social critique as well as its relationship with luxury fashion brands.

3.3 Lyrics, symbols and cultural value

While I recognise that 'business is business', hence why academics focus on the commercial aspects of the rap and luxury fashion brand relationship regarding lyrics and product placement, this thesis argues that through the integration of luxury brand names into Afro-diasporic linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005); this induces a butterfly effect of luxury brands being intrinsically concomitant to aspirational capital (ibid.). Facchinetti (2010) and Hadley (2012) affirm that rappers' aspirations are communicated in lyrics, in which I concur and propose that luxury brand lyrical name-drops amplify the social commentary that rap music is known for (Rose, 1994), rather than simply being a platform for marketing brands. In his work on celebrity endorsement, McCracken (1989) posits that the interplay

between celebrity identity and cultural influence is pivotal in moulding consumer attitudes, extending beyond the confines of formal endorsement deals. Indeed, there are elements of celebrity endorsement evident when rappers reference luxury brands within their lyrics. Nonetheless, I contend that the prevalence of luxury brand name drops within rap lyrics often constitutes an unintentional endorsement, wherein a rapper informally references a brand or product. Yet, these instances can significantly shape consumer perceptions (Cabalquinto, 2020). Such occurrences elucidate why numerous scholars such as Burkhalter and Thornton (2012), Metcalfe and Ruth (2020) and Farwell *et al*. (2023) characterise such name drops as forms of product and brand placement.

There are instances where complex messages about luxury brands are presented in lyrics. Oware (2018) conducts content analysis on lyrics by underground and independent rap artists and notes that those rappers are free of corporate burdens and can say whatever they want in their songs. Therefore, I consider how such an artist can be candid and blunt in referencing luxury brands in their music; not all mentions must be 'positive' for the brand, which I have noted in UK rap lyrics. Every message inherently contains an encoded preferred meaning (Hall, 1973), including lyrics. Hall (1973) posits that media producers encode messages imbued with specific meanings; however, audiences possess the capacity to decode these messages through varied interpretations. He delineated three modalities through which audiences interpret media, the first being the dominant-hegemonic position, wherein audiences acquiesce to the message as the producer originally conceived it. Secondly, there is the negotiated reading, wherein audiences assimilate certain aspects of the message while dismissing others. Lastly, the oppositional reading occurs when audiences construe the message in a manner that opposes the producer's intended meaning (Hall, 1973). In this scenario, the producer is identified as the rap artist, and the audiences have the capacity to engage with the lyrics in various ways. They may interpret the lyrics precisely as the rapper intended, selectively resonate with certain elements of the lyrics, or actively resist the messages conveyed by the rapper in their songs. For instance, when a rapper articulates a preference for tracksuits over luxury brands such as Prada or Gucci, this choice may be interpreted as a deliberate challenge to prevailing societal norms. The audience's reception of this message can vary significantly; they may resonate with the message of the rapper, embrace the tracksuit as a symbol of authenticity or acknowledge the tracksuit while simultaneously aspiring to Prada or Gucci, or they may reject the rapper's overarching message altogether. Consequently, conducting a more thorough content analysis of lyrics is imperative to transcend mere product placement and highlight the deeper meanings expressed by UK rappers of the African diaspora, particularly when contrasted with references to luxury brand names. However, we must consider how

the meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989) of the rapper to the brand rests in their cultural influence, which may be of an anarchic nature toward luxury brands or align with them.

The influence of UK rap music on audiences is primarily attributable to its cultural contributions to identity formation (Bramwell, 2015), rather than merely its connections to celebrity status and culture. However, these elements do play a role. The sway that I refer to is attributed to Hall's (1980) definition of the theory of culture, which he bases on Williams' (1961) work. Hall posits that culture encompasses the study of relationships among elements within a whole way of life, intricately woven into all social practices and representing the totality of their interconnections. Consequently, the cultural influence I am discussing emerges from rap music as a social practice among its audiences. Rap culture significantly influences both individual and collective behaviours as well as social realities. Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital elucidates the relationship between cultural influence and social hierarchies, positing that dominant groups strategically employ culture as a mechanism to assert and sustain their power. He argues that culture functions as a form of power employed by prevailing social groups to sustain their status through the influencing of preferences, tastes and social norms. Bourdieu's analysis fails to consider the trickle-up fashion theory (Blumberg, 1970), which proposes that working-class groups exert influence on upper-class groups as mentioned in the earlier section. In the case of rap, it serves as a resource predominantly associated with the urban working class (Rose, 1994; Romero, 2012; Bramwell, 2011; 2015), distinct from the prevailing social elites. Nevertheless, elite luxury brands have actively pursued collaborations with rap artists, recognising the significant cultural influence these artists wield and the potency of their cultural approval. I draw on Bauman (1992, p. 195), who articulates the phenomenon whereby individuals in postmodern society pursue the acquisition of 'symbolic tokens of belonging'. Black music has dismantled conventional boundaries separating high and low culture, a concept pivotal to postmodernism (Hebdige, 1987). Rap music exemplifies the fusion of postmodernism, such as pastiche, bricolage, and blank irony with modernist socio-political dissent (Manuel, 1995). I propose that luxury brands function as the tokens articulated by Bauman (1992), with their value or worth being validated by rappers who possess significant mass appeal and popularity. These artists contribute not only to street credibility (Miller, 2011) for luxury brands but also a sense of authenticity (rooted in rap's dedication to social issues), thereby enhancing the perceived value of these luxury brands. Thus, Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of cultural influence and capital proves inadequate for examining UK rap music and its relationship with luxury brands, as it does not pertain to the dominant class carrying cultural influence in the context of this thesis.

3.4 Black gendered dimensions of rap

This work develops academic discourse on the facets of UK rap music in terms of lyrical contexts. It highlights what this genre means to its audiences and creators concerning luxury fashion, how Black male and female rappers implement luxury brand lyrical mentions, and if those lyrics echo or intensify Black masculinity and femininity constructs.

Gendered experiences, contexts, and factors surrounding race and class can inform the artistic expression in UK rap music. This thesis does not delve into the gender politics of rap music extensively, however, it considers how luxury brand mentions in UK rap lyrics enhance, dilute or subvert the gendered constructs central to Black men and women. Rap lyrics create opportunities for making ideologies and perceptions, informing patterns or traits (Craig, 2015). I propose that lyrics allow for Black femininity and masculinity constructs to be expanded. According to Avery *et al*. (2016), no analytic work has investigated gendered themes conveyed in songs performed by Black artists commercially. There needs to be more insights into the gender-specific contexts present in rap lyrics (Avery *et al*., 2016). Aside from lyrics, this thesis explores the perspectives and experiences of a male and female UK rapper concerning the UK rap and luxury fashion brand intersection. Mclean and Syed (2016) state that gender contributes to one's sense of self and identity; arguably, gender affects how luxury is utilised by the Black man or woman. Owen *et al*. (2012) state that gender highlights multifaceted aspects, and out of all social categories, it encompasses cultural ways of being, indicating that gender is vital in dissecting and understanding behaviour, perceptions, patterns, and influences. Gender is a crucial social factor in cultural configurations (Connell, 2005). Thus, exploring the ways in which Black gendered constructs have constituted the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora, UK rap, via contexts of luxury brand name-drops, as well as how each gender relates with luxury brands can contribute to the academic discourse surrounding Black masculinity and femininity in rap music.

To interrogate contexts of lyrical brand name-drops, we must understand the gender expectations or ideologies surrounding Black men and women. Johnson (2013), Hill (2022), and Thomas *et al*. (2022) highlight that Black male gender expectations revolve around being a protector and provider, which coincides with the concept of hustle culture for Black men (hooks, 1994). Rap music is a cultural platform in which they have asserted their cultural power within society. Lack of equal economic opportunity for Black men, compared to White males (Longhi and Brynin, 2017; *The Centre for Social Justice*, 2020) and, in some cases, other ethnic minority groups, has resulted in rap music being a

unique tool for Black men. Rap allows Black men to not only express themselves and their circumstances but to make an honest living within disempowered working-class areas and conditions, steering away from illegal activity (Blain, 2023) whilst describing their urban areas (Barron, 2013; Bramwell, 2011). hooks (2003) highlights how Black men embody the hustler culture that made making money a goal and overlooked how that money was made, resulting in Black men being able to reinforce themselves as powerful in a society where they were made to feel powerless. Garnes (2009) studies Black masculinity in African American culture and describes Black hustler culture as a means for young Black men to transform in poor urban areas. The outcome and epitome of Black hustler masculinity and culture is self-reliance and evolving from young Black hustlers on the streets to being Black cultural leaders and producers (Garnes, 2009). In the black British context, rap music is connected to Black hustler culture in the UK, and facets of that culture are present in some UK rap songs. The use of luxury brand names in rap songs highlighting contexts of Black hustler ideologies (hooks, 2003) is an assertion of attaining luxury by virtue of 'the hustle'.

For Black women, the gender expectations are supposedly centred on being strong and caregivers (Thomas *et al*., 2022), which is a far cry from the title that Rose (1994, p. 146) gives to her chapter dedicated to women in hip-hop, *Bad Sistas.* Rose's rationale for such a title rests in Black female rap artists being resistant voices in popular music and engaging in ongoing dialogue with their audiences and Black male rap artists about sexual promiscuity, infidelity and Black cultural history. Although she focuses on African-American women and states that they provide a safe free-play zone where they can address issues of sexual power, Black British women can do the same. In doing so, we must question how luxury brand names aid in such discourse, because of their prevalence in rap and hip-hop culture as seen in the earlier sections. I have yet to see academic discourse on how issues surrounding sexual power are amplified by the use of luxury brand name-drops. For example, using the American rapper Lil Kim as an illustration, Collins (2004) discusses how the rapper uses the term 'pussy', which has a sexual connotation, being a form of female genital slang (Braun and Kitzinger, 2001) referring to the vagina when rapping about power and pleasure. Rather than her audiences viewing her as the equivalent to Black male misogynistic rappers, she is viewed as being 'real', reflecting Black female authenticity, and simply using the idea or term 'pussy' as a marketable aspect to sell Black female sexuality (Collins 2004). Language and socially 'derogatory' terms in lyrics can enhance messages about sexual power. Because of the connotations that surround luxury brands, such as prestige, as stated in the earlier sections, lyrics mentioning luxury brands can, therefore, cloak sexual connotations that may be viewed as derogative or feeding into the objectifying rap male gaze (Rose, 1994), thus defeating 'disparaging' lyrics with aspirational facets. Although my work does not

delve into hip-hop feminism, through the analysis of luxury brand mentions beside lyrics of subversion and sexual power, we may underline how hip-hop feminism (Sepehri, 2020) is amplified by luxury brand name drops.

This thesis does not engage in an in-depth exploration of hegemony, nor does it discuss the sexism within the Black community, as that deserves focal attention. However, it is pertinent to examine literature that addresses hegemony's intersection with Black masculinity and femininity, particularly in the context of rap music, because of its dichotomous nature. The concept of hegemony significantly influences the constructs of Black femininity and masculinity by establishing normative standards regarding what is considered 'acceptable' behaviour, appearance and identity, to which rap music subverts to and re-negotiates on its own terms by its generators. Collins (2000) discusses the influence of hegemonic norms on the perceptions of gender roles among Black men and women. She argues that stereotypes such as "mammy," "welfare queen," or "jezebel," which uphold White-dominant gender expectations and marginalise Black women's diversity of identities; and are frequently foisted upon them. Hegemonic standards of White masculinity and femininity are upheld by portraying Black masculinity via lenses of hyper-masculinity, deviance or criminality. Hegemonic masculinity marginalises Black masculinity by representing it through stereotypes that stand in contrast to White masculinity (Connel, 1995). Collins (2000) promotes a more complex interpretation of intersectionality that subverts these prevailing beliefs and gives Black men and women the freedom to rethink their own identities in ways that go beyond hegemonic clichés. Depictions of femininity and masculinity that convey hegemony can be observed in commercially successful songs by Black artists from the period of 1990 to 2010 (Avery *et al*., 2016). Such an observation suggests the presence of powerful constructs surrounding gender. Nonetheless, rap serves as a critical medium that contests prevailing power structures by presenting counter-narratives concerning race, identity, and class (Rose, 1994). Rap music serves as both a reflection of and a resistance to dominant cultural norms, positioning itself as an arena for cultural negotiation. In the context of luxury brand references within lyrical compositions, one observes a duality wherein the promotion of items resonates with dominant cultural values. However, within the larger context of these lyrical mentions, Black rap artists, irrespective of gender, possess the capacity to negotiate, subvert, and ultimately challenge hegemonic cultural norms. Black men and women in rap music challenge the established norms and expectations of hegemony, significantly contributing to the representations of contemporary Black masculinity, femininity and sexuality. In doing so, they engage in a process of decolonisation, reclaiming agency over how they wish to be perceived within 'the White man's world'. Black women have the opportunity to reclaim their power and challenge longstanding prejudices, such as the archetypes of

the Black female breeder or mammy (Collins, 2000; Bond *et al*., 2021) and the jezebel (Collins, 2000; Rosenthal and Lobel, 2016). For Black men, perhaps luxury fashion mentions juxtaposed with the Black masculine connotations surrounding being a provider (hooks, 2004) are amplified, driving away from the criminal and deviant pigeon-holes. This reclamation involves transforming lyrical representations of sexuality and sensuality into expressions of freedom and independence (Rose, 1994). The incorporation of luxury brand references can thus foster the production and negotiation of new meanings and calls for further exploration in scholarship.

Scholarly investigation may commence by examining the lyrics of both Black men and women that illustrate Rose's (1994) discourse on sexual liberation in contrast to sexual objectification, for instance. Rap lyrics often possess profound meanings that subvert societal expectations and stereotypes, which, when intertwined with references to luxury fashion brands, provide further connotations. Therefore, I pose the inquiry regarding the extent to which the lyrical invocation of luxury brand names may serve to enhance either the subversion or the affirmation of constructs related to Black gender identities.

3.5 UK rap fashion identity and subcultural facets

While this thesis primarily examines luxury fashion brands and their relationship with UK rap, it is essential to acknowledge the significant aspects of identity that clothing conveys, which are integral to both UK rap and its broader cultural context. As stated in Chapter One, identity serves as the foundational element of my research; it constitutes the core upon which UK rap is established, and it represents the essence of the UK African diaspora. The cultural currency of UK rap is tightly knit into the fabric of identity; fashion is deeply connected to identity; thus, exploring how identity politics intersect within the UK rap and luxury fashion relationship is necessary. Entwistle (2015) explores fashion and dress within social and cultural contexts, highlighting their roles in shaping and articulating identity. She posits that fashion serves as a manifestation of embodied identity, meticulously linked to constructs of class and gender. In the analysis of UK rap, it is imperative to recognise that identity serves as both the foundational canvas and the instrument of expression, while clothing acts as the medium that enriches and accentuates the rapper's identity, highlighting working-class and gendered constructs.

In essence, identity serves as both the foundation and the mechanism through which rappers utilise fashion. As Entwistle (2016) reflects on the trajectory of fashion scholarship since the publication of

her seminal work, *The Fashioned Body* (2000), she discusses Aspers and Godart's (2013) essay on fashion scholarly work in the *Annual Review of Sociology*, wherein they contend that fashion remains undervalued within academia, to which she disagrees. I argue that fashion is not devalued but desperately needs decolonial contributions. This is especially pertinent in discussions surrounding how Black individuals have engaged with fashion and dress as armour; "the individualised construction of a look through the assemblage of garments and accessories" (Tulloch, 2018, p. 163); to navigate not only issues of class and gender but also the complexities of racial stereotypes and their implications. Such a consideration holds significant relevance due to the demonisation of UK rap (Fatsis, 2018), which extends to the racialisation and demonisation of the hoodie and tracksuit (Rahman, 2016; Parker, 2022). The racial weaponism and (un)conscious biases caused by sportswear are puzzling. The integration of sportswear, with a particular emphasis on Nike, has played a pivotal role in shaping the aesthetic landscape of grime since its inception in the early 2000s (Parker, 2022). The tracksuit is a working-class ensemble (Appleford, 2015) and is an integral part of UK rap and modern Black Britain, exemplified by its incorporation in the 2018 Nike advertisement "Nothing Beats a Londoner," which features the artist Skepta. Although Parker (2022) states this perpetuates racial stereotypes through the cultural appropriation of grime culture, the Nike advert demonstrates what Tulloch (2010, p. 276) terms as “style narratives.” Tulloch’s term refers to the process of self-telling to amplify one's autobiography through the clothing choices that an individual makes. The style narratives can also be interpreted as what Lewis (2003, p. 179), who Tulloch cites, refers to as diaspora fashion, which he asserts encompasses beliefs and behaviours which separate diaspora fashion from the mainstream. The concept of style narratives affirms how identity is the cornerstone of dress in regard to the UK African diaspora and combined with Lewis’ (2003) notion of diaspora fashion, brings forward considerations of subcultural dress.

Subcultural dress denotes the unique style and fashion choices embraced by individuals within a subculture, serving as a medium for expressing their identity and values, and frequently, a form of resistance to prevailing mainstream norms (Hebdige, 1979). Subcultural groups employ various forms of expression, including clothing and accessories, to cultivate a sense of belonging and to distinguish themselves from the prevailing cultural norms (ibid.). It is astonishing to observe how inconspicuous subcultural attire, such as tracksuits within the UK rap scene, has engendered a moral panic that parallels the overtly subversive nature of punk subcultural dress. The utilisation of bricolage within punk culture signifies its association with acts of rebellion, as stated by Hebdige (1979). Whilst punk employed style and fashion to express alienation, unemployment and socio-economic conditions with offensive messages through dress (ibid.) among the White working-class youth (Worley, 2017)

and resisting mainstream values, it was not racialised. Although this thesis is not set on contributing to the realm of subcultural studies, UK rap is a youth subculture (Dedman, 2011), as I have established earlier. It thus requires looking to academic discourse regarding (youth) subcultures and dress. In Azzopardi's (2013) book, *Youth: Responding to Lives*, Bell (2013, pp. 11-26) presents a chapter entitled *Re-Vitalising the Youth Subculture Concept*. He articulates a definition of youth subcultures as "meaning and action systems created by young people sharing similar interests, preferences and life-chances." He acknowledges cultural deviant theorists such as Cohen (1955), whose work, *Delinquent Boys*, I have critiqued for its potential to reinforce harmful stereotypes about Black youth. Cohen posited that the notion of youth subcultures serves to elucidate youth delinquency and youth gangs in America. He contended that these subcultures emerge as collective reactions to social strain among working-class adolescents who engage in delinquent behaviours as a means to symbolically transcend the barriers that hinder their access to aspirations. However, as Dedman (2011) states, markers of subcultural affiliation are complex for an "outsider" to understand; thus, unless one is a member of the subculture they discuss, they cannot truly comprehend it. What truly accounts for the necessity of translating the meaning and action systems developed by youth into the context of gangs and delinquency? As previously stated, this terminology poses a detrimental impact on UK rap, promoting the criminalisation of the genre (Fatsis, 2018) and adversely affecting young Black British men, thereby exacerbating the demonisation associated with the tracksuit (Rahman, 2016; Parker, 2022). What is so felonious about the tracksuit? Or is it perceived as precarious because of who wears it? Though I agree with Cohen's (1955) acknowledgement that such subcultures are meaning systems that provide a sense of belonging, we simply cannot assume that all youth subcultures are delinquent or gangs. As Thornton (1995, p. 7) posits, in the context of youth cultures, race continues to be a flagrant dividing factor. We must acknowledge that depending on who comprises the specific youth-subcultural group, the label of delinquency can be more damaging for some than others because of the issue of race. Bramwell (2011, pp. 43-44) critically analyses Thornton's (1995) *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, asserting that one of her arguments replaces the attribution of labels by print media concerning socio-cultural processes. He contends that her perspective fails to yield any understanding of the social and political mechanisms and values that differentiate specific subcultures from one another. Informed by Bramwell's perspective, which emphasises the social and political importance of (sub) cultures with the goal of differentiation, I examine the tracksuit as a form of subcultural attire that serves as a modern embodiment of the style narratives associated with the UK African diaspora (Lewis, 2003; Tulloch, 2010). This thesis, therefore, disentangles the tracksuit from both the diminutive and skewed portrayals in the media, and the generalised, detrimental notions

advanced by academics such as Cohen (1955), recognising it instead as a co-ord with complex dimensions that offer insights beyond conventional understandings of subcultures.

The tracksuit can be interpreted as an act of resistance to mainstream values and superficiality. However, the underlying cause of this opposition may also be rooted in the denial of freedom, employing inconspicuousness to evade scrutiny from prejudiced observers. At times, seeking freedom through dress may be interpreted as rebellion. Tulloch (2018, p. 163) postulates that "freedom" is integral to the essence of the African diaspora experience. She recognises that music plays a fundamental role in the culture of the African diaspora and, regarding "the aesthetics of freedom," one cannot disentangle the influences between music and the styled body. Because freedom is the quintessence of Afro-diasporic identity (Tulloch, 2018, p. 163), fashion and dress are tools to express or seek freedom in UK rap. Clothing innately entails the transmission of social signals. Every ensemble communicates a story, often a nuanced one, about the person who wears it (Castillo, 2014). The tracksuit being integral in UK rap music underscores the entanglement that Tulloch (2018) discusses, demonstrating that fashion transcends mere aesthetics; it is intricately linked to the ways in which individuals navigate and articulate components of their identities within various social contexts. Clothes not only establish an atmosphere for the body but also for the mind (Crane, 2000, p. 163), serving as a dual mechanism of self-expression and a complex social process (Wilson, 1985). The social process of the African diaspora involves identity formation and double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903), resilience and resistance (Fanon, 1961), racial and ethnic solidarity (Appiah, 1992) and cultural retention and adaptation (Gilroy, 1993). Instead of reducing the ardour of the tracksuit among young Black men within the UK African diaspora to mere delinquency or disorder, it is essential to examine how such clothing plays a role in establishing a social foundation that is deeply intertwined with identity formation (Kawamura, 2005). The tracksuit acts as a semiotic[6] tool (Barnard, 1996; Owyong, 2009; Barthes, 2010) for expressing and asserting identity and conveying information about values and beliefs (Barnard, 1996). Therefore, examining the tracksuit as an emblem of the double consciousness inherent in Black British youth identity is imperative. Drawing on Lurie (1983), we can interrogate the tracksuit's role as a visual language that reflects emotions, serving as a contemporary

[6] This thesis does not intend to exhaustively explore the intricate discourse surrounding semiotics; however, it is pertinent to define it as the study of signs and symbols (De Saussure, 1916; Barthes, 1957; Barthes, 2010), with a particular focus on their role in conveying meaning within specific cultural contexts. Concerning clothing, semiotics pertains to how garments operate as symbols that communicate social and cultural meanings (Barnard, 1996; Owyong, 2009; Barthes, 2010), which underpins its brief mention in this section.

cultural artefact within the UK diaspora that communicates silently yet powerfully. Recognising the tracksuit as a symbol of resilience and resistance is essential, serving as a communal garment that embodies racial and ethnic solidarity. Furthermore, it exemplifies cultural adaptation and plays a significant role in cultural retention when identified as subcultural attire within the UK rap scene. Consequently, when luxury brands and the dynamics of industry 'politics' are involved, it is imperative to question how a cultural intermediary, specifically the fashion stylist, illustrates and navigates the meanings and values inherent in UK rap culture. These meanings and values relate directly to UK rap fashion identity, as discussed in this section. This inquiry centres on whether the upholding of authentic identity is effectively implemented.

3.6 The fashion stylist

In the preceding section, I explored the mechanisms by which identity is conveyed through clothing in depth. This literature review now turns to the existing scholarship on the stylist. As Romero (2012, p. 33) states, US Hip-Hop made stylists superstars, signifying that the role of the stylist within the realm of rap music is credited or acknowledged as the 'power behind the image' so to speak. Fashion is the stylist's tool of power. However, the objectives behind that power arguably vary for the stylist, rooted in fashion as a construct; a cultural practice and a symbolic product (Kawamura, 2005, p. 32). Thus, I consider the stylist's role within UK rap, a cultural resource that has exhibited subcultural dress that differs in many ways from that of US hip-hop. As Entwistle (2015) states, people establish who they are through fashion. At the same time, fashion can easily dilute or manipulate who someone is if they are dressed by someone else.

The stylist's role necessitates a broader consideration beyond dressing the body, especially in styling UK rap artists; in this case, clothing must remain a symbolic product (Kawamura, 2005, p. 32). The stylist must ensure that the rap artist is perceived as a human rather than a mannequin, with the clothes reflecting the artist's identity. The existing academic literature on the fashion stylist is notably sparse, indicating a potentially underexplored domain within the field of study. Lynge-Jorlén (2020) represents the key scholarly work that thoroughly examines the role of the stylist, detailing their functions and how they engage with music, magazines, celebrities and brands. While her research on music emphasises a commercial perspective of US hip-hop, I utilise her work to outline the premise of the stylist:

> The role of stylists is more than simply interpreting and translating fashion design, as an intermediary between the designer and the consumer or reader of magazines. Instead, they actively co-create the symbolic meaning and immaterial value in fashion imagery. Styling is an act, where something new is created by selecting, making or even designing items and putting them together in a new constellation. It can thus be said that styling is the act of providing style through conscious selection.
>
> (Lynge-Jorlén, 2020, p.3).

The stylist serves as a cultural intermediary (Lyngé-Jorlen, 2016) between brands and consumers; in this case, the consumer is the rap artist. Although Lynge-Jorlén (2020) dedicates a chapter to identity, gender, ethnicity and style narratives, she emphasises the stylists' intermediation as being predominantly motivated by commercial agendas (Lynge-Jorlén, 2016) and the imperatives of economic and market efficiency, particularly regarding editorial styling. This observation indicates the presence of neoliberal elements that position people below profit goals (Harvey, 2005) concerning editorial styling for the rapper. Instead, I view the context of intermediation by the stylist to be uplifting the identity of the rapper, not the brand or magazine. The stylist has the potential to facilitate the decolonisation of imagery, particularly in relation to Black representations within fashion media, or to conform to neoliberal and capitalist agendas. There seems to be no academic discourse that underlines the stylist's role in regard to rap artists as such. To dissect the role of a fashion stylist as an intermediary in the preservation and enhancement of a rap artist's identity through clothing, as opposed to utilising the rapper's body solely for marketing purposes, I find solace in the work of Tulloch (2010). She references Lewis (2003, p. 179), who asserts that stylists construct and manipulate narratives on the body. Nevertheless, he observes that this process is significantly distinct from 'style' as an irretrievable element, which, akin to creativity, cannot be distilled into a formula or description, nor can it be replicated. Tulloch articulates her view of style as a form of agency, emphasising the role of garment assemblage in the construction of identity, irrespective of prevailing fashion trends. Tulloch positions the concepts of self and identity as central to the utilisation of style, warranting consideration within the minimal academic discourse surrounding the relationship between the stylist and the rapper. Stylists must take into account the style narratives (Tulloch, 2010) of rap artists when styling them, which Lynge-Jorlén (2020) draws on. However, she posits that the stylists' own aesthetic interpretations and dispositions influence how fashion is facilitated. These elucidations are "not allowed unrestricted freedom but moulded by intricate symbolic and economic

bargaining with marketers and press offices" (Lynge-Jorlén, 2016). As Romero (2012, p. 32) states, the stylist's role in hip-hop has been to get clothes from designers who want to put their clothes on the back of a particular rapper. In that sense, business motives are clear. It is essential, as a stylist, to acknowledge the presence of commercial considerations within the intersection of luxury fashion brands and rap. However, brands mustn't dilute or sever the connection between the rapper and their audiences, who prioritise the rapper's identity and authenticity over their attire. Thornton (1995, p. 26) posits that "authenticity is to music what happy endings are to Hollywood cinema - the reassuring award for suspending disbelief". The concept of authenticity in music pertains to the perception that a particular song or artist resonates as 'real' or 'genuine' to the audience. The focus lies in articulating emotion or truth in a manner that profoundly resonates with the audience. Authenticity in music can be conceptualised as a pivotal emotional experience for the listener, akin to the resolution of a narrative arc that culminates in a satisfying conclusion for film audiences. Both facilitate audience engagement by ensuring that their emotional investment is perceived as valuable. Consequently, the stylist must facilitate the evidence of authenticity within the visual representation associated with rap artists. This may necessitate the involvement of the rapper in the styling process, emphasising the importance of identity in contrast to capitalist considerations.

Aside from being a cultural intermediary (Lynge-Jorlen, 2020), the stylist is a translator; thus, questioning how the stylist propels the cultural currency within UK rap through imagery is necessary. By that, I mean how to ensure that the stylist curates imagery that contributes to the overall cultural 'iconic' moments of UK rap music. An example of what I mean can be seen in Lifter's (2020) contribution to Lynge-Jorlén's (2020) *Fashion Stylists: History, Meaning and Practice* with a section under the *Identity, Gender, Ethnicity and Style Narratives* chapter, dedicated to *Styling 1990's Hip-Hop, Fashioning Black Futures,* which is highly Americanised. However, that is understandable given that in the 90s and early 2000s, hip-hop and fashion were more synonymous in the US. Within the said chapter, Lifter (2020, p. 162) discusses June Ambrose, who Romero (2012) also refers to briefly. Ambrose is a stylist who is known to have shaped the look of New York-based hip-hop. Ambrose worked with US rap artist Missy Elliot and music video director Hype Williams in 1997, for *The Rain [Supa Dupa Fly]* music video, which was nominated for three VMA[7] awards. I use this as an example for my argument on how the stylist should propel the cultural currency of UK rap. In a time where commercial and societal preferences categorised the Black female body into binary contexts, being either the Black woman you take home to your mother or the Black woman you meet at three o'clock

[7] The VMA Awards are the annual MTV music video awards, giving awards to artists according to categories of music genres.

in the morning (Rose, 1990, p. 114), Ambrose defied dressing Missy Elliot as such in *The Rain* music video. Instead, she curated an iconic look that amplified the cultural currency of hip-hop, which is arguably why academics such as Lynge-Jorlén and Lifter (2020) have included this example in what is possibly the first academic book to extensively discuss the stylist. Ambrose styled Missy Elliot in a constructed "blob-ish" shaped outfit, in what she coined as a "Black Michelin Man", after receiving the treatment and instructions from Hype Williams. The intention was for Missy Elliot to be dressed as the Michelin Man, the mascot of the tyre company Michelin, which, as Ambrose stated, looked like a white marshmallow (Lifter, 2020, p. 163). Here, we see how Ambrose took the creative authority and initiative when styling Missy Elliot and curated an image/visual that would aid in hip-hop's cultural currency, prioritising the Blackness that is its core. Similarly, in the UK rap context, the stylist must endeavour to culminate the currency through iconic looks that do not swallow the impact that each creative project can have, not only within popular culture but for Black culture. In an example such as Lifter's (2020), we see how the stylist is a cultural intermediary and translator beyond the confines of designer and consumer.

The stylist can be a better storyteller if they are submersed in the rap artist's world. Stylists seek inspiration from contemporary music (Lynge-Jorlen, 2020). Although Lynge-Jorlén discusses how stylists build relationships with their clients, in the case of working with rap artists, I argue that the stylist must take the initiative to learn more about their clients through their lyrics. By surveying lyrics, the fashion stylist can consider significant elements when dressing rappers who devote themselves to components that constitute their brand identity, facilitating an indirect collaborative effort outside of conversations that may take place in building rapport. This consideration expands the role of the stylist and the depth in which stylists are cultural intermediaries or how they may share their position as such with rappers, which is explored further in the empirical chapters.

3.7 Conceptual framework

A robust conceptual framework is essential in structuring the theoretical scaffolding that underpins this thesis. This research interrogates the relationship between UK rap music and luxury fashion brands, with a specific focus on the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora within the said interrelationship. As such, the conceptual framework must reflect the epistemologies and ontologies of the communities being centred. Rather than rely on Eurocentric models of cultural capital that universalise White middle-class experience, this thesis turns to Pan-Africanist ideologies and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) model as its theoretical anchors. Together, these paradigms

enable a nuanced reading of Black British creativity; particularly as it is expressed through fashion and lyricism; not merely as performance, but as a site of resistance, wealth-building, and diasporic memory.

Pan-Africanism provides a decolonial foundation through which to understand how Black people across the diaspora mobilise culture as a vehicle for unity, survival, and sovereignty. It is not just a political ideology, but a cultural framework embedded in a long tradition of African and Afro-diasporic intellectualism (Garvey, 1923; Nkrumah, 1963; Asante, 1988). Pan-Africanism is the core ethos of this study. It serves as a lens through which the lyrical and stylistic choices in UK rap are understood; linking the music to a wider history of Black unity, resistance, and cultural expression across the African diaspora. The fusion of Caribbean, African and Black British identities; particularly evident in artists like Skepta and Shaybo who are contributors to this study via interviews and a case study; is not a cultural accident but a continuation of Pan-African convergence and solidarity. Through fashion and music, UK rappers engage in the performative expression of diasporic belonging that is both global and local.

Pan-Africanism critiques the epistemic violence of colonialism by reclaiming African-centred worldviews. Asante's (1988) theory of Afrocentricity insists that cultural analysis should begin from the standpoint of African agency, memory and knowledge systems. This is particularly relevant for understanding how UK rap artists deploy dress and brand alliances to reclaim aesthetic authority. When artists fuse Afro-diasporic generated streetwear with luxury fashion or remix diasporic style codes and narratives (Tulloch, 2010), they participate in a visual politics of reclamation. These acts do not merely reflect trends but act as epistemic interventions that reposition Blackness at the centre of cultural production; a move that directly challenges hegemonic fashion discourses often dominated by Euro-American whiteness (Tulloch, 2016).

To measure UK rap as a cultural expression and form of currency and to understand how rappers navigate the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay, this thesis deploys Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model. Rooted in critical race theory, the CCW framework identifies six forms of capital: aspirational, resistant, linguistic, familial, social, and navigational (as discussed earlier in this chapter); that communities of colour develop and transmit in the face of structural inequity. This framework is apt for the analysis of UK rap because it captures the rich, often unrecognised, social and cultural knowledge and strategies embedded in Black communities. Unlike Bourdieu's (1986) model of cultural capital, Yosso's model values alternative knowledge and assets that emerge from

historical and structural marginalisation. For instance, aspirational capital is visible in the way UK rappers use lyrical references to luxury fashion brands as projections of upward mobility. This does not imply mere materialism; rather, as Rose (2008) suggests, it symbolises dreams of social advancement in societies that structurally inhibit Black economic progress. These aspirations are not individualist in the neoliberal sense but collective, informed by histories of class exclusion and cultural denial. Aspirational capital thus allows rappers to "dream out loud" through lyrics, dress and visual branding, offering younger generations symbolic blueprints for success and recognition (Hadley, 2012; Rabaka, 2013).

In parallel, resistant capital enables a reading of UK rap as oppositional culture. Following Freire (1973) and hooks (1990), resistance is not simply about rejection but about the creation of new meanings and survival strategies. When UK rappers critique the fashion systems that now embrace them, by being selective with brand deals, controlling their image, or spotlighting their own communities, they are not simply resisting exclusion, but reclaiming creative autonomy within industries that often co-opt subcultural style while erasing the core meaning and roots. These acts of refusal and redefinition, often expressed lyrically or sartorially, constitute resistant capital that challenges the structures of cultural exclusion while operating within them (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Miller, 2011). The concept of cultural currency is deployed in this thesis to link these capitals to broader market dynamics. This thesis refers to cultural currency as the value derived from cultural expressions (being UK rap in this case), particularly when these expressions become monetised by external industries (in this case, the luxury fashion sector). UK rap, like US hip hop before it, has become a vital currency in luxury branding; used to infuse fashion with credibility, street edge, and "cool" (Warren *et al*., 2019; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023). Yet, the communities that produce this currency are often excluded from the profit it generates. This thesis investigates how artists like Skepta have attempted to reverse this logic by collaborating on their own terms, using fashion not only as personal branding but as a site of Black authorship and strategic negotiation.

Authenticity, a contested term in rap discourse, also functions within this study as a moral and cultural imperative. Scholars such as Krims (2000), Speers (2017), and McLeod (1999) highlight how authenticity in rap is often tethered to personal history, community legitimacy, and stylistic consistency. In the context of UK rap, authenticity is not about essentialism but about demonstrating a coherent relationship between lived experience, lyrical content, and identity. The concept of authenticity becomes even more complex when aligned with luxury fashion. This thesis argues that UK rappers navigate authenticity through a Pan-African lens; affirming their heritage, rejecting

erasure, and asserting style as both a personal and political statement. Another important concept embedded within this study's framework is styling as discourse. As Entwistle (2000) and Tulloch (2016) argue, dress is a communicative act shaped by identity, power, and history. Within UK rap, fashion becomes a language through which artists negotiate status, heritage, and resistance. The stylist's role; underexplored in academic literature; becomes crucial in shaping this discourse. This thesis investigates the role of the stylist and how stylists act as cultural translators, facilitating the visual articulation of diasporic narratives and statements through clothing. The creative labour of stylists, particularly Black stylists, is integral to this cultural ecosystem.

Navigational capital also plays a central role in understanding how Black UK rappers navigate the elite fashion industry. As Yosso (2005) describes, this form of capital reflects the ability to move within institutions not designed for communities of colour. The thesis explores how artists strategically engage with luxury fashion brands; sometimes rejecting, sometimes collaborating; to carve out space and visibility. These actions are not evidence of neoliberal complicity, but of diasporic ingenuity and negotiation (Gilroy, 2010; Bhattacharyya, 2015).

Ultimately, the integration of Pan-Africanism and CCW within this conceptual framework enables the development of a diaspora-centred lens for reading UK rap as a cultural form. It allows the thesis to foreground the historical, political, and social contexts that shape lyrical and stylistic choices, while offering alternatives to Western frameworks that reduce culture to commercial output or subcultural rebellion. Instead, this framework positions UK rap as a Black British archive and knowledge base of aspiration, resistance, and heritage; a living practice of cultural wealth generation that deserves serious scholarly attention. Pan-Africanism also offers a crucial epistemological reorientation in this study. Rather than centring dominant Western frameworks to analyse culture and aesthetics, Pan-Africanist thinking compels a return to Black ways of knowing, including oral traditions, rhythm, resistance through fashion, and community accountability (Asante, 1987; Clarke, 1991; Gilroy, 1993; Copeland-Carson, 2004). These epistemologies foreground collective memory, embodiment, and diasporic connection as valid forms of knowledge, challenging Eurocentric hierarchies that often marginalise Black expressive cultures. Scholars such as Thiong'o (1986), Asante (1987), and Wynter (2003) call for decolonising not only institutions, but consciousness itself. In this context, UK rap becomes a site of epistemic sovereignty; a space where artists reclaim the right to define themselves and narrate their realities through culturally grounded practices, such as storytelling through lyricism and the symbolic coding of fashion (hooks, 1990; Yancy, 2000; Gilroy, 2002). These are not marginal practices, but central to how Black diasporic life is theorised in real time, drawing from oral traditions,

performance, and visual aesthetics that function as both expression and resistance (Rose, 1994; Perry, 2004; Campt, 2017). UK rap artists thus participate in a long-standing intellectual tradition in which cultural production is a form of theorising, identity-making, and political critique. This epistemological shift also allows for a clearer engagement with methodological positionality. Yosso's (2005) CCW model reframes marginalised communities not as passive subjects to be 'discovered', but as active knowledge holders embedded in systems of meaning, history, and resistance. This reorientation has significant implications for the research design, particularly the use of semi-structured interviews and content analysis; methods that are not neutral but deeply interpretive (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Chilisa, 2012) and will be discussed in the next chapter. When guided by Pan-Africanist thought (Asante, 1987; Clarke, 1991) and critical race theory inflected frameworks (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017), these methods become tools for relational, culturally grounded inquiry. They centre Black epistemologies, making space for knowledge that emerges through dialogue, shared experience, and narrative nuance (Smith, 1999). In this study, the industry professionals interviewed are not just participants but co-constructors of knowledge. Their lived realities complicate, expand and challenge theoretical assumptions in real time, in line with decolonial and participatory research paradigms (Tuck and Yang, 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Moreover, incorporating Pan-Africanist and CCW frameworks supports an ethical imperative: To resist extractivist models of research that draw value from Black cultural production without recognising the intellectual labour embedded within. UK rap, through its flows, brand associations, and styling practices, is already engaged in the theorising of Black life. This thesis, therefore, treats lyrics, clothing choices, and personal narratives as not just objects of study, but as acts of theory-making in themselves. This approach aligns with what Moten and Harney (2004) describe as the under-commons: Spaces where marginalised people create knowledge outside of, and often in resistance to, formal institutions. UK rap, especially in its connections to luxury fashion, exists within this under-commons: It is highly visible in mainstream culture, yet remains structurally marginalised by the very systems that commodify and capitalise on Black cultural expression (hooks, 1992; Hall, 1997; Gilroy, 2002; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Bramwell, 2015; Nnorom, 2021).

This thesis's conceptual framework also provides a critical structure for analysing gendered dimensions within the study. By including Shaybo's interview and Skepta's case study, the thesis resists the masculinist overcoding of UK rap scholarship (Huq, 2006; Cundy, 2018) and centres Black female agency as integral to cultural production. Pan-Africanism has often been critiqued for its patriarchal biases (Amadiume, 1987), and this thesis engages with that critique by highlighting how

Black female UK rappers contribute equally to diasporic cultural currency. Through fashion, linguistic play and lyrical boldness, female artists like Shaybo assert a gendered form of community cultural wealth, particularly within the domains of resistant, aspirational and navigational capital. This addition further refines and feminises the framework, ensuring it is not only decolonial but also intersectional. The conceptual framework must also interrogate the political economy of style; specifically how fashion operates as both a form of self-representation and a mechanism of class boundary maintenance. Within neoliberal capitalism, fashion increasingly functions as a status signifier; a visible code through which inclusion and exclusion are performed (Entwistle, 2000; Crane, 2012). For the UK African diaspora, the adoption and remixing of luxury fashion becomes a symbolic intervention into this exclusionary economy. Through the cultural resource of rap, artists reconfigure garments and brands historically associated with elite whiteness into emblems of Black pride, visibility and mobility. However, this re-signification is not always liberatory; it is a negotiation that exists within the constraints of capitalist spectacle and commodification. Thus, Yosso's (2005) model of navigational and aspirational capital helps illuminate how Black artists subvert, yet remain entangled in, the logics of luxury consumption.

Additionally, the aesthetics of UK rap must be understood as forms of diasporic resistance that visualise pride in heritage and place. Sartorial choices, whether referencing African prints, Jamaican colours or British streetwear codes, carry cultural weight that exceeds mere style. These visual signifiers operate as aesthetic assertions of belonging, resisting assimilation and disrupting dominant narratives of British mono-culturalism (Hebdige, 1979). Such expressions reflect what Gilroy (1993) terms the "Black Atlantic": a cultural space where diasporic identity is constantly negotiated through music, dress and performance. Fashion in UK rap thus becomes a site of political meaning, where racialised and diasporic individuals claim visibility and challenge their cultural marginalisation (Tulloch, 2004). Drawing from Pan-Africanism, this aesthetic self-fashioning becomes a mode of remembering and reconnecting with ancestral traditions, even if mediated through Western brand symbolism. It also reflects what Hall (1990) describes as the "unfinished identities" of diasporic subjects; always becoming, never fixed, and often articulated through expressive culture. UK rap artists construct their visual identities in ways that speak to past present, and future Blackness; situated at the crossroads of colonial history, local perseverance and global aspiration.

This conceptual architecture must also account for the extraction of Black cultural labour by the fashion industry. The fact that Black rappers have become marketing assets for luxury brands is not incidental; it is central to how these brands maintain relevance with global youth markets (Banet-

Weiser, 2012). Yet, as Miller (2011) and Allen (2021) argue, the fashion industry has historically excluded Black people from ownership, authorship and representation. While rappers may be visible, they are often denied equity and creative control (Tulloch, 2016). Thus, this thesis advocates for Black cultural and economic ownership as a means of reclaiming narrative power and resisting systemic exploitation. The CCW framework provides a lens through which to view the uneven exchange between Black cultural production and white capitalist gain, revealing how the linguistic, aspirational, and social capital of Black artists is routinely extracted, commodified, and monetised without fair reinvestment or compensation for the potency and global reach of their cultural currency (Yosso, 2005; hooks, 1992; Banet-Weiser, 2012). This dynamic reflects broader patterns of cultural appropriation and exploitation in the creative industries, where Black expression is often celebrated yet structurally devalued (Hall, 1997; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Nnorom, 2021). Pan-Africanism sharpens this critique by foregrounding the importance of Black self-determination, collective ownership, and institutional sovereignty as necessary responses to ongoing cultural theft and symbolic domination (Asante, 1987; Clarke, 1991; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

The symbolic function of luxury brands in UK rap lyrics also deserves conceptual attention. Brands such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, or Hermès serve as more than aspirational references; they are linguistic currency markers, signalling the rapper's ability to transgress class boundaries, occupy elite spaces, and challenge the aesthetics of power. However, as Bourdieu (1984) suggests, symbolic capital is always relational. It gains value only within specific fields. What UK rap reveals is a shift in the cultural field, where Black artists reshape the meanings of luxury by inserting Black narratives into traditionally white-coded spaces. Here, Yosso's resistant, navigational and linguistic capital become especially useful: The brand name becomes a metaphor, a challenge, a punchline, or a form of poetic subversion-blending aspiration and upward social mobility with critique.

This conceptual framework is grounded in a refusal to see UK rap as a derivative of US hip hop. Instead, it situates UK rap as an autonomous, diasporic cultural expression rooted in post-colonial Britain (Bramwell, 2015). While the genre may share commonalities with US and global hip hop cultures, this study frames it as a distinctive Afro-diasporic archive of knowledge, survival, aspiration, and critique. By combining Pan-Africanism's emphasis on transnational Black unity (Clarke, 1991; Adi, 2018) with CCW's attentiveness to localised forms of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), this thesis provides an original lens to examine how UK rappers intersect with luxury brands and negotiate their cultural power and invaluable influence. The conceptual framework is not only theoretically informed; it is

methodologically embedded, epistemologically intentional, and politically committed to affirming the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora.

Finally, this conceptual framework makes space for a reimagining of Black cultural agency not as reactive, but as generative. By weaving together Pan-Africanist ideologies (Nkrumah, 1968; Rodney, 1972; Clarke, 1991; Adi, 2018) and the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005), this research asserts that UK rap is not simply a reflection of marginalised life; it is an active, intentional construction of meaning, identity, and value by Afro-diasporic individuals. It is through rap's sonic innovations, lyrical references, and fashion aesthetics that Black British artists disrupt colonial categories and produce new forms of Afro-diasporic selfhood. These forms, while entangled in neoliberal markets, are not reducible to them. Rather, they demonstrate how cultural producers use heritage and imagination to survive, thrive and theorise in real time. This conceptual framework, therefore does not only support the study's research questions; it is itself a decolonial act of repositioning theory to centre Black life, creativity and complexity on its own terms.

Conclusion

This chapter consolidates the conceptual lens through which the thesis interprets UK rap's cultural currency. By applying Community Cultural Wealth, it frames UK rap as a resource that generates alternative forms of value and centres Black epistemologies. It shows that style, gender performance, and visual identity are not peripheral to UK rap but integral to its meaning-making. By acknowledging the stylist's contribution as a form of cultural storytelling, the review expands how agency, authenticity and aesthetics are understood in relation to UK rap. Collectively, the literature engaged across Chapters Two and Three lays the conceptual foundation for the thesis, allowing the empirical chapters to analyse UK rap not simply as an artistic movement, but as a living archive of Afro-diasporic creativity, currency and resistance. The following chapter outlines the methodological ethos of this thesis, guided by the imperative to centre Black epistemologies. Through content analysis of lyrics, semi-structured interviews and industry insights, the aim is not to reproduce the logics of capitalism, the White gaze, or outdated theoretical paradigms. Instead, this research privileges the voices of Black creatives themselves, allowing them to articulate what UK rap's cultural currency means on their own terms and contributing to the recognition and expansion of Black knowledge systems.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework underpinning this thesis, which examines the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands. Specifically, this research aims to: (1) Highlight how UK rap operates as a form of Black British cultural currency from which the luxury fashion sector derives value. (2) Contribute to knowledge on the cultural wealth of the UK African diaspora concerning UK rap music. (3) Explore expressions of decolonisation within UK rap, particularly those grounded in pride in heritage. To achieve these aims and to address the research questions, I adopt a constructivist paradigm, which allows for the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant and recognises knowledge as situated, partial and shaped by culture, history and positionality.

The chapter begins by justifying the use of a constructivist methodological approach, which is appropriate for capturing the complexities and lived experiences within Black cultural expression and UK rap. I argue that this paradigm is essential for interpreting meanings that are under-represented or marginalised in dominant scholarship, and for advancing Black epistemology.

I then introduce my research participants: industry professionals Ibrahim Kamara, Shaybo, Nicole Vernon, Grace Ladoja and Lash; and explain why they were selected. Alongside these semi-structured interviews, I also draw on a case study of UK rap artist Skepta. The participants were selected not only for their professional expertise in the intersecting fields of rap and luxury fashion but also because they are Black and British, positioning them as gatekeepers, intermediaries and informants in the articulation and dissemination of diasporic cultural capital.

The next section explores the rationale for using semi-structured interviews, a qualitative method well suited to constructivist inquiry due to its emphasis on dialogue, reflexivity, and the co-creation of knowledge. I then explain my use of thematic analysis as a tool for lyrical content analysis to examine a sample of UK rap lyrics. I detail my sampling criteria, coding methods, and the analytical framework used to explore how themes of cultural wealth, aspiration and brand affiliation emerge within lyrical texts.

Following this, I address the restrictions and practical challenges encountered during fieldwork, including access to celebrity participants and methodological adjustments made along the way. Finally, I reflect on ethical considerations, emphasising how my positionality as a Kenyan-born Black researcher—who is not British— shapes and limits my perspective. I address issues of subjectivity, bias and the interviewer effect, particularly in relation to interviewing Black industry professionals about racial politics, representation, and cultural production concerning UK rap music.

4.2 Fuelling Black epistemology: A constructivist approach

The value of conducting research with Black individuals to enhance our theoretical understanding of Black cultural resources, such as rap music and their incorporation into a White-dominated sector, luxury fashion, is apparent in Anzaldúa's (1990, p. xxv) appeal to people of colour below:

> "Theory, then, is a set of knowledges... Because we are not allowed to enter discourse... it is vital that we occupy theorising space, that we not allow White men and women solely to occupy it."

This thesis contributes to the academic understanding of the cultural wealth of Black British people. It is an up-to-date portrayal of the UK African diaspora researched by a Black academic, directly addressing Anzaldúa's (1990) call for people of colour to infiltrate the theorising process. The current scholarly landscape lacks sufficient representation of Black experiences and viewpoints, which increases the need for modern and diverse academia centred on Blackness by Black academics (London School of Economics, 2014). Sociologists examine racial meaning at the core of their academic work (Roth *et al*., 2023), which is fundamental in exploring how UK rap intersects with luxury fashion brands and asserting UK rap as a Black cultural resource and part of the UK African diaspora's cultural currency. The community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005), grounded in critical race theory (Bell, 1986; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001) and the Pan-Africanist school of thought (Du Bois, 1903; Garvey, 1923; Fanon, 1961; Nkrumah, 1963; Diop, 1974; Asante, 1980, 1987; Mazama, 2003; Thiong'o, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018), has shaped the overarching theoretical perspective discussed in Chapter Two. Critical race theory hovers over a radical constructivist approach (von Glasersfeld, 1998), aiding in the decolonisation of epistemology (Sweeting, 2018). It also rejects universal, objective truths in favour of contextual, lived and subjugated knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Black industry experts in the UK rap sphere should be recognised as contributors to reconfiguring the theorising process of how rap music intertwines with luxury brands, whilst simultaneously underscoring the aspirational, resistant, navigational, social, familial and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) generated by Black UK rappers. They are sources of knowledge that can enlighten us about the cultural meanings that UK rap music and culture embody, and the role these play in shaping identities (Miller, 2011; Bramwell, 2011, p. 105; 2015). Withholding recognition of such sources of knowledge would suggest that information obtained from certain individuals, groups and cultural practices from particularly ethnic minority communities are unworthy or undervalued (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000). There is no privileged position from which one should gain knowledge (Blanchard-Emmerson, 2017). Thus, research focusing on recognising Black cultural resources should acknowledge Black perspectives and identities as generators of sets of knowledge.

4.2.1 Philosophical positioning: Justification for a constructivist paradigm

This research adopts a constructivist paradigm, grounded in the belief that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and shaped by context, rather than simply discovered (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1997). This paradigm is appropriate for exploring UK rap as a cultural resource that produces meaning through the lived experiences, perspectives, and creative outputs of Black British artists and industry professionals. It supports the study's aims to examine the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, to contribute to knowledge about the cultural wealth of the UK African diaspora, and to emphasise examples of decolonisation within UK rap. Through semi-structured interviews and content analysis, this research centres the meaning-making practices of UK rap artists and professionals, particularly how their identities, stylistic choices, and lyrical content articulate cultural value, authenticity and heritage. Crucially, constructivism must be distinguished from positivism. While positivism assumes that objective knowledge exists independent of human perception and can be observed, measured and generalised (using quantitative methods), constructivism posits that knowledge is situated, multiple, and interpreted through social context. It is this interpretive lens that allows this study to account for subjectivity, power, heritage and cultural pride embedded in the practices and meanings UK rappers associate with fashion and style.This interpretive position aligns with constructivist thought, which holds that knowledge is produced through interaction and shaped by individual experiences and cultural contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Thompson, 2017; Holstein and Gubrium, 2007). The Handbook of Constructionist Research supports this view by emphasising that knowledge is a discursive accomplishment produced through interaction. While constructionism places greater emphasis on the social and discursive context, both

approaches reject the idea of objective, neutral knowledge. This insight validates the use of semi-structured interviews and lyrical content analysis; methods that foreground dialogue, interpretation and reflexivity. The emphasis on how participants make sense of their own identities, stylistic choices, and relationships to luxury fashion brands exemplifies what Holstein and Gubrium (2007) refer to as the "interpretive practice of making visible the practices of meaning-making." Constructivism is therefore the most appropriate paradigm because it enables the study to foreground lived experience, rather than reduce it to abstract variables or statistical relationships. Moreover, social constructivism (Kim, 2006; McKerrell, 2016) emphasises that culture and context are essential in understanding how social realities are shaped. This is vital when exploring diasporic Black British identities, especially in cultural practices like rap music, which are saturated with symbolic meaning, resistance and community values.

This philosophical positioning is consistent with the research aims outlined in Chapter One: To examine the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, to contribute knowledge regarding the cultural wealth of the UK African diaspora through UK rap, and to emphasise examples of decolonisation anchored in pride in heritage. Constructivism supports these aims by enabling an interpretive engagement with the meanings produced by UK rap artists and related industry professionals, as well as the contexts in which those meanings are constructed. Through this lens, knowledge is viewed as socially and historically situated, allowing the study to foreground participant perspectives and lyrical expressions as vital forms of cultural production. Due to the fact that I predominantly draw on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, which encapsulates forms of capital in cultural negotiations, constructivism is a methodologically coherent and epistemologically sound approach for this thesis. Kim's (2006, p. 27) notion of social constructivism underscores how cultural identities shape and are shaped by knowledge. Constructivist and constructionist approaches (McKerrell, 2016) can dissect and illuminate how Blackness, heritage and pride are negotiated within rap culture (Yi and Shorter-Gooden, 1999; Rogers, 2020), and how lyrics act as texts for cultural identity (Davis and Pereira, 2016). Studies rooted in Pan-African music and decolonial theory have consistently embraced constructivist paradigms (O'Callaghan *et al*., 2011; Nyika and Murray-Orr, 2017; Kithinji and Anyanwu, 2020).

Finally, constructivist paradigms are increasingly recognised as decolonising methodologies (Kilian *et al.*, 2019). These paradigms offer space for Indigenous, Black, and subjugated epistemologies to be centred; an essential element of this research's third aim: to identify examples of decolonial cultural production through UK rap as a Black resource embedded in pride, resistance, and heritage.

4.3 Research participants: What rappers, industry professionals, and why

First and foremost, it is important to unreservedly acknowledge that the sample of interviewees in this study is not fully representative of the wider African diaspora within the UK. While the participants offer valuable, in-depth insights into the intersections of rap, fashion and cultural identity, their experiences reflect specific positionalities within a diverse and multifaceted diaspora. This limitation is not overlooked or minimised; rather, it is recognised as a characteristic of qualitative, constructivist research, which prioritises contextual depth over broad generalisation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The findings, therefore, aim to illuminate particular narratives and perspectives rather than claim to speak for the entire UK African diasporic experience.

To conduct my research, I approached a diverse group of industry experts with interview requests. Conducting interviews is efficient for engaging with celebrities and influential figures in celebrity culture (Driessens, 2014). The selection was based on the following criteria: being able to contact them through Instagram or if their website or Instagram page provided an email address, their familiarity with UK rap artists and culture, and their knowledge of UK rap and its association with luxury fashion brands. As I have stated in Chapter One and Chapter Two, the African diaspora comprises people of African descent, from what Gilroy (1993) terms the Black Atlantic, including people from the Caribbean. I contacted Stefflon Don[8] and D-Block Europe,[9] who are Black, British and Caribbean, via email and Instagram messages but did not get a response. The research participants who responded to me were mostly Black British and of African heritage, aside from one of them who is Jamaican. From a Pan-Africanist perspective, the ethnic background[10] of my research participants is inconsequential; their representativeness of the African diaspora in Britain is the only requirement. Reaching out to industry professionals with established credibility and significant contributions to UK rap as a Black British cultural resource was of utmost importance to my study. The significance of engaging these participants lies in the way their insights substantively contribute to my thesis's original contribution to knowledge. I delegated themes in each of my semi-structured interviews according to their areas

[8] Stefflon Don is a popular Jamaican-British UK rap artist (*BBC*, 2024).

[9] D-Block Europe is an Afro-Caribbean UK rap duo (The Face Magazine, 2024).

[10] For the purpose of this thesis, ethnic background is defined as the social group to which a person belongs and either identifies with or is identified by others as a result of a combination of cultural and other factors, including ancestry, language, and features traditionally associated with race (Bhopal, 2014).

of expertise, in order to address the research questions, aims and objectives. This section will discuss who I selected for my study, why I selected them, and how I gained access to conduct these interviews.

I first interviewed Ibrahim Kamara, the co-founder of GUAP magazine, for just over fifteen minutes at the GUAP headquarters in South East London in May 2023. This online magazine is featured on *Forbes* (Williams, 2019) and was displayed at the *Beyond the Bassline: 500 Years of Black British Music* (2024) exhibition. I approached Kamara on Instagram because of his significant contributions to Black British representations within digital media, which have featured UK rappers. This study responds to ongoing calls for greater diversity within academic research and representation (Saha, 2018). Kamara has positioned GUAP magazine to champion diversity, equity, and inclusion in their editorials and at their GUAP gala (*BBC*, 2023), which I observed being coined as 'the Black Met gala' by *X* (former *Twitter)* users. The GUAP gala awards ethnic minority underrepresented professionals within the creative industries, with categories that include fashion, music and photography. Furthermore, Kamara is Black, British and of Sierra Leonian heritage, making him a member of the UK African diaspora.

Figure 1: Image of Ibrahim Kamara (Linkedin, Nd)

My second interviewee was Shaybo, whom I also contacted via direct message on Instagram in April 2023. I interviewed her on a FaceTime video call for slightly over twenty minutes and later spoke to her via voice notes on Instagram. Shaybo is a popular UK rap artist; her nickname is “Queen of the South,” which is related to her upbringing in South London, but she is sure to declare her Nigerian roots in her music (*The Guardian*, 2021). I first came across Shaybo when she released her *Hardest Bars Freestyle* (2019), and it was the first time I heard a female UK rap artist demonstrate a Londoner aesthetic while simultaneously infusing Nigerian lingo in her lyrics, which I now identify as Black British linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). I requested an interview with Shaybo because her lyrics illustrate double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; Gilroy, 1993), exemplifying how UK rappers from the UK African diaspora amalgamate their descent or ethnicity with their Britishness. Her lyrics also feature luxury brand names, which, like other UK rappers, when combined with her raw and unfiltered style of music, made me wonder whether such lyrics were amplifiers of messages or forms of product placement. In addition to her songs featured in my content analysis selection, which I discuss in the later sections, I contacted Shaybo for an interview for a female UK rap artist's perspective on UK rap's interplay with luxury fashion brands.

Figure 2: Image of Shaybo (Genius, Nd)

Thirdly, I interviewed Nicole Vernon, a stylist and creative director. Vernon has styled Skepta, Lancey Foux and other UK rap artists and has been featured in *Dazed and Confused Magazine* (2024). As I briefly discussed in Chapter One, I was Vernon's assistant stylist for the *Papi Chulo* (2020) music video featuring Skepta. This experience catalysed my inquisition of the UK rap and luxury brand interrelationship and my investigation of the role of the fashion stylist within this intersection. On the one hand, I experienced the week-long sourcing for products from PR agencies and luxury brand stores. On the other hand, I observed Skepta making decisions about his clothing and exhibiting keen knowledge of fashion brands, detailed meticulousness in his outfit, and assurance in his style and how he wanted to appear in the music video. Thus, I interviewed Vernon based on her experience of styling rappers, her credibility, and her expertise to interrogate the stylist's role and understand if she considers factors outside of clothing and dress, such as identity, when styling rap artists. Our interview took place in person at Hackney Downs Park in East London in October 2023 and lasted just under forty minutes.

Figure 3: Image of Nicole Vernon (Everand, 2024)

Grace Ladoja, MBE, was my fourth interviewee. I also contacted her through a direct message on Instagram. She gave me her email address, and I interviewed her in October 2023 on Zoom for just over an hour. Ladoja has received an MBE for her services to the music industry. She is a music executive who managed Skepta (*BBC*, 2021) and is the co-founder of Metallic Inc., a global culture studio focusing on music, brands and audiences. Additionally, she founded Homecoming, an annual festival that fosters cultural exchanges of music and fashion among rising creatives (*Forbes*, 2021). I first came across Ladoja in 2018 when I attended a Converse pop-up store she facilitated, where she also spoke on a panel. I have followed her on Instagram over the years and observed her evident assimilation into the luxury fashion world and her apparent relationships with fashion leaders such as the late Virgil Abloh (Vogue, 2018; Abloh and Warsh, 2021). Her prominent role in the UK rap and high-end fashion industries and her dual British and Nigerian identity make her an instrumental research participant for this thesis.

Figure 4: Image of Grace Ladoja (Metallic Inc, Nd)

My last research participant was Lash, the founder and CEO of STEELO, a digital platform and application that documents cultural experiences behind the scenes within the fashion and music industries. I contacted STEELO on Instagram and engaged in email correspondence before interviewing Lash at the STEELO headquarters in Central London in February 2024. I found STEELO on Instagram and YouTube in 2020. I watched their video capturing a studio session that STEELO coins as

a ‘steez session’, showcasing UK rap artists Skepta, Lancey Foux, Unknown T and Deto Black for the *Franchise Remix* video[11]. I valued the *real*, unobtrusive and uncommon portrayals of rap artists that appear to be absent in the contemporary realm of social media and fixations of shallowness in celebrity culture and imagery (Gamson, 1994). I then encountered a STEELO behind-the-scenes video showcasing Lancey Foux's collaboration with Matthew Williams and Givenchy, demonstrating the dynamic relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion brands. The video showcased the manifestations of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005) through the apparent personal connection between Matthew Williams, the former creative director of Givenchy (*WWD*, 2023) and Lancey Foux. Despite keeping a relatively low-key profile, Lash has also appeared on the runway for Louis Vuitton, holds a significant position in UK rap culture and is a member of the renowned group Boy Better Know (*Guardian*, 2017).

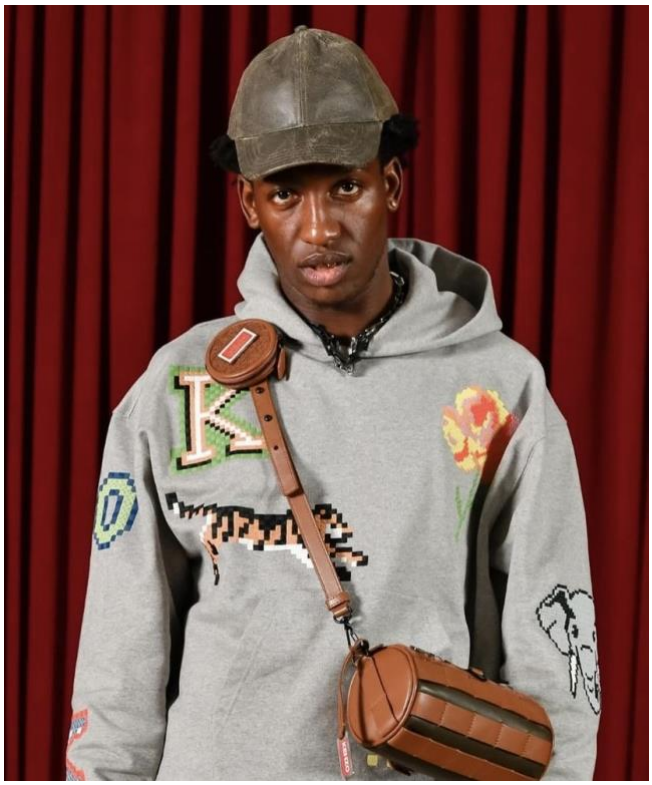

Figure 5: Image of Lash (Instagram, 2024)

[11] Lancey Foux, Unknown T and Deto Black are UK rap artists. Lancey Foux and UnknownT are featured in the content analysis selection for this thesis.

My case study on Skepta is informed by his lyrics and semi-structured interviews with Ladoja, who has observed Skepta's professional development and involvement in the high-end fashion industry, and Lash, his close friend and associate. I consider Ladoja and Lash as 'key informants' who play a crucial role in formulating case studies as they offer valuable insights and can propose sources of supporting or contradictory evidence (Yin, 1994, p. 90). I contacted Skepta via Instagram direct message and emailed his company, Big Smoke Corporation. However, I was unable to secure and arrange an interview with him, which I will discuss later in my limitations section. The case study on Skepta examines the interaction between a male UK rapper and luxury fashion brands. His inclusion in this thesis is attributed to his unification into luxury fashion (Vogue, 2017). Skepta was one of the first UK rappers to be recognised within the luxury fashion industry and has been the face of brands such as Bottega Venetta (Vogue, 2021) and has a personal relationship with creative directors of luxury brands (GQ, 2020). Additionally, Skepta's lyrics include numerous luxury brand name mentions, some in unanticipated contexts that also form my case study on him, which I will examine in Chapter Six.

Figure 6: Image of Skepta (The Guardian, 2022)

Each interview participant represents a unique fusion of experiences, perceptions, expertise and new knowledge essential for advancing Black epistemology and enriching the academic discourse on UK rap music. The interviewees hold significant relevance in the current fashion and music scenes, reinforcing this research as a valuable scholarly dialogue of contemporary value. The next section will provide an in-depth discussion of the semi-structured interview method. In conclusion, it is essential to acknowledge that no singular research methodology can provide a comprehensive understanding of cultural issues, given the diversity of opinions and beliefs among individuals. Various methodologies will communicate distinct 'truths' (Mckee, 2003), thereby enabling this study to unearth novel and original insights through the inherently adaptable approach of semi-structured interviews.

4.4 Constructivism as qualitative research: A semi-structured interview method

Based on their suitability for ordinary conversations and the negotiation of meaning-making between researcher and participant, semi-structured interviews have been identified as a valuable data-collection method for constructivist research (Mojtahed *et al*., 2014). Constructivist researchers, frequently although not universally, employ qualitative methods for data gathering and analysis (Thompson, 2017). According to constructivists, reality is something people construct in their minds, not something that can be found in the world (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Semi-structured interviews let the researcher and the participants negotiate and co-create meaning through conversation to gather data (Mojtahed *et al*., 2014). The qualitative research method allows my study to thoroughly understand the research subject and depict and convey individual experiences as well as opinions (Tomaszewski *et al*., 2020). Constructivism refutes the notion of objective information located in an external reality that the researcher may retrieve through mechanical means. Instead, the researcher's beliefs and attitudes shape the knowledge formed by engaging with the phenomena and participants in the investigation (Given, 2008). In the case of my research, earlier, I elucidated the factors that motivated me to undertake my investigation on UK rap's relationship with luxury fashion brands, which revolved around my work experience and consumption of rap music. Constructivism posits that knowledge is socially constructed and subject to the influence of culture, institutions and historical contexts (Thompson, 2017). Moreover, my stance, firmly rooted in my Pan-Africanist values, motivated my aim to underscore UK rap as a UK African diasporan cultural currency. My position as an academic is inherently intertwined with my Black identity (Bowden and Buie, 2021). A researcher following the constructivist paradigm underlines the significance of participants' constructs, descriptions and narratives of their lived experiences and the conviction that knowledge is collaboratively generated between the researcher and the participant (Tashakkori *et al*., 2021). This

approach aids in the inclusivity of Black people's perspectives in formulating epistemology through semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews are essential for interrogating, posing open-ended questions, and aiming to understand varied professionals' autonomous thought processes (Adams, 2015). Semi-structured interviews facilitate the collaborative development of knowledge and understanding between the researcher and participant throughout the data-collecting process (Mojtahed *et al*., 2014). I ensured that my semi-structured interviews with each participant revolved around my research questions and considered vital points, including purposes, conceptual contexts, methods and validity (Maxwell, 1965; Wengraf, 2001). My in-depth interviews with Kamara, Shaybo, Vernon, Ladoja and Lash were guided and allowed me to pilot the interviews based on their answers, as, in many cases, that triggered further inquiry. There was a structure; asking pre-planned questions that essentially encouraged additional discussion, allowing my research to establish specific themes and bring forward perspectives, which give this thesis substance aside from originality.

Utilising semi-structured interviews as one of my qualitative research methods aids in the recognition of rappers and related Black industry professionals' voices in academia, which Black youth who consume UK rap music or identify with my research participants' perspectives can resonate with. They can read about people who look and talk like them and have similar lived experiences in scholarly work, thus addressing the critical issue of the disparity of Black perspectives in academia (Collins, 1990; Stanfield and Dennis, 1993; Romm, 2010). Semi-structured interviews serve as an opportunity for UK rap artists to be recognised within academia, demonstrating that UK rappers are not only sought after for their coolness or street credibility (Miller, 2011; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). They are also valuable sources of knowledge in understanding today's UK African diaspora and how their cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) has manifested. Semi-structured interviews provide thematic insight into the intricate relationship between UK rap music and luxury fashion brands, surrounding its cultural complexities, commercial aspects and contributions.

I employed thematic analysis to analyse the semi-structured interviews that were conducted. It is a widely used approach for methodically examining interview transcripts (Jowsey *et al*., 2021). Thematic analysis is a systematic approach employed to identify, analyse and report themes within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). Thematic analysis can be carried out within constructionist paradigms, investigating how societal discourses influence events, realities, meanings, experiences, and other phenomena (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.85). However, because my research employs a constructivist

approach, it is essential to clarify that constructionist and constructivist paradigms are similar despite dominant discussions about their differences. Constructionism (Papert, 1980) draws inspiration from Piaget's (1968) constructivist theory. Both theories view knowledge as being produced. However, constructionism focuses on social processes (Raskin and Bridges, 2004). In slight contrast, constructivism places the individual in a more prominent position, which I do by exploring the perspectives of individual industry professionals in my semi-structured interviews and case study on Skepta, informed by some of those participants. The similarities between both are attributed to their shared emphasis on processes of creating meaning (Raskin and Bridges, 2004). According to constructionist thematic analysis, individuals' descriptions of their experiences should not be regarded as a clear reflection of their reality (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 95), which I disregard in my thematic analysis because of my overarching constructivist approach.

Themes are commonly defined as "domain summaries" or "summaries of what participants said concerning a particular topic or data collection question" (Braun *et al*. 2019, p. 5). A theme encapsulates the fundamental concept of the data in connection to the research question and reflects a certain degree of consistent response or meaning within the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82). The foremost prerequisite is to maintain consistency throughout identifying themes in what each of my participants said that may be interconnected. Themes are valuable only when they are connected to create an overall picture (Bazeley, 2009, p.6). A stringent thematic approach generates a perceptive analysis that addresses specific research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to examine the interview data from two viewpoints: firstly, from a data-driven angle and a coding-based inductive approach (Frith and Gleeson, 2004); secondly, from the research question standpoint to verify the consistency of the data with the research questions to provide relevant information (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Jugder, 2016).

I did not use NVivo or any other computer software to conduct the thematic analysis. Instead, I chose to use the Microsoft Word transcript feature. I carefully reviewed the transcripts, rectified any computer errors, and then re-listened to each interview recording while re-reading the transcripts. I then identified themes and used a colour code to highlight statements that aligned with the identified themes. Constructionist thematic analysis does not need intricacy and detail in the transcript; there is no one way to carry out thematic analysis or a defined set of instructions to adhere to while generating a transcript (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 88). However, it calls for a meticulous and complete record of all verbal statements (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 88). For example, I have included instances when my research participants say "like" or "um" when they share their perspectives or think as they speak in

the transcripts. Additionally, punctuation might modify the significance of data (Poland, 2002, p. 632); the transcript has to retain the necessary information from the spoken discourse and be true to its original essence (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thus, I reviewed the interview recordings four times to guarantee that the transcripts accurately represented the semi-structured interviews. Analytical purposes are effectively served by the transcribing convention (Edwards, 1993); thematic analysis ensures that the empirical chapters contain statements from the transcripts that are most relevant to my research questions, aims and objectives and underlines deeper meanings. I then formulate theories regarding the correlation between UK rap and luxury fashion brands and how UK rap represents the UK African diaspora's contemporary cultural currency.

Qualitative interviews provide fresh perspectives on social phenomena by enabling respondents to uniquely contemplate and analyse various topics (Folkestad, 2008, p. 1). Through semi-structured interviews and the utilisation of thematic analysis, varied perspectives from industry professionals provide insights derived from their expertise on UK rap, fashion styling, and fashion identities central to UK rap. These perspectives also address how authenticity coincides with these ideas, thus underlining new information that the researcher has not been privy to, because of its absence in the literature surveyed. A constructivist approach enabled this study to collect qualitative data that allowed my participants to articulate their opinions and experiences explicitly (Thompson, 2017). This helped in facilitating an understanding of context and the negotiation of meaning, which, when combined with content analysis of lyrics, in the same way that Bramwell (2011) uses semi-structured interviews to support his textual analysis of song lyrics, brings further insights to contexts and denotations behind the examined lyrics, which the following section addresses.

4.5 Content analysis: What lyrics and why

The use of rap music lies in its ability to raise awareness and provide insights into cultural matters (Iwamoto *et al*., 2007). Rap music is a channel for change (Heath and Arroyo, 2014); when viewed via its lyrics, as I have previously contended, it has the potential to impact knowledge production. Rap music decodes and draws out primary data regarding experiences (Allett, 2012). It has also been used for critical analysis (Lavoulle, 2016), demonstrating how rap lyrics can be a tool for deciphering meanings and contexts. Examining UK rap lyrics can bring understanding to economic aspirations and urban conditions, which Bramwell (2011) explores. Content analysis on UK rap lyrics underlines meanings and contexts that are intensified when luxury brand name-dropping is contrasted with lyrics that underline aspirations in disadvantaged socioeconomic situations and the attainment of success.

UK rap lyrics also bring understanding to the awareness of Caribbean and African heritage that UK rappers exhibit, thus underscoring the central focus of the diaspora in this study. Additionally, lyrics about heritage may be distinctive or underline a dichotomy of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) within UK rap; for example, a Jamaican-British rapper may rap in Patois, or a Nigerian-British rapper may rap in Pidgin; these are considerations that have informed the data collection for content analysis.

UK rap lyrics also bring understanding to the awareness of Caribbean and African heritage that UK rappers exhibit, thus underscoring the central focus of the diaspora in this study. Additionally, lyrics about heritage may be distinctive or underline a dichotomy of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) within UK rap; for example, a Jamaican-British rapper may rap in Patois, or a Nigerian-British rapper may rap in Pidgin; these are considerations that have informed the data collection for content analysis.

Content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004). As a qualitative research method, it is a systematic approach to interpreting the content of messages, including audio. That analysis can then draw conclusions (Gheyle and Jacobs, 2017). Music is often studied for its content (Couto *et al*., 2022). Various scholars have used content analysis as a qualitative medium to study song lyrics (Cole, 1971; Craig and Bichard, 2014; Edwards, 2020; Couto *et al*., 2022). UK rap lyrics are one of the forms of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) for the UK African diaspora as established in Chapter Two; it is a medium of storytelling featuring rhymes and rhythm, which, when combined with the themes of my study, informed the sampling process.

In contrast to Mutegi *et al*. (2014) and Couto *et al*. (2022), who used the Billboard Hot 100 chart as a sampling frame for their content analysis, I, as a rap consumer, opted to sample the two-hundred and sixty-four songs based on the popularity of a selection of forty-one UK rap artists;[12] some of them I had not listened to extensively. In addition, the selection of artists was shaped by who my research participants have worked with, as well as the focus on my case study on Skepta. Of the long-listed sample collection, thirty-four songs are either by or feature him. Additionally, of the forty-one UK rappers, two are non-Black and have been included in the selection because they feature in tracks by rappers who are members of the UK African diaspora. The selection comprises mainstream, independent and underground artists. As discussed in Chapter Two, Oware (2018) highlights in his study that underground or unsigned rap artists can say what they like in their songs, which I consider

[12] Two hundred and fifty-six songs are either by or featuring the stated forty-one rap artists.

could then implicate the context in which luxury brands are mentioned and issues concerning product or brand placement. I used the selected rappers' Apple Music page to randomly choose songs between 2014 and 2024 from their 'top' songs on Apple Music. I extensively explored their albums, singles, features and the UK rap playlist that Apple Music curates. I already knew some of the songs, but there were various songs I had not listened to within the said two hundred and sixty-four long-listed songs; thus, being mindful of any biases that could have arisen as the researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1994; Charmaz, 2014). I carefully reviewed each song by listening to it and reading the lyrics using the Apple Music lyrics feature to determine if it would be included in the final sample selection for further analysis. However, if the lyrics were unavailable, I used *Genius.*[13] The final sample collection consists of one hundred and twenty-six songs that were chosen based on their frequency of luxury brand mentions and their exemplification of aspirational, familial, resistant and social capital (Yosso, 2005) to underpin the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora and illustrations of the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay. The final sample was then coded[14] to thematically categorise the lyrical data based on nine overarching aspects: the presence of luxury brand name-dropping, fashion week or party events, mentions of the tracksuit or Nike to elicit facets of subcultural dress, indications of community cultural wealth, heritage, oppression, decolonisation, stylist references and dispositions of gendered constructs, particularly Black feminine and masculine connotations that are amplified or opposed.

Qualitative content analysis necessitates thorough data preparation (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015). The justification for selecting content from data derived from existing texts should be based on what one wants to know (Patton, 2002). In the case of my study, I use lyrics to address my research questions and objectives and aim to achieve my research goals. The qualitative content analysis process typically starts at the initial phases of data gathering (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015), which I initiated in the first year of my PhD programme. Early engagement in the analysis phase is recommended as it facilitates the transition between concept development and data gathering, guiding further data collection towards valuable sources in addressing the research questions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Searching for UK rap lyrics earlier in my research project led me to look for concepts outside of rap and luxury fashion studies to integrate into my work, such as the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005), to tackle my research questions and develop theories.

[13] Genius coins itself as the world's biggest music encyclopedia. It is a credible source for song lyrics and also seeks meanings of lyrics from artists (Genius, 2014).

[14] Usually, there are more precautions in the coding precautions and procedures when there is more than one coder (see Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015). However, this was not the case for this thesis because I coded the final sample myself.

Content analysis through a constructivist approach entails identifying themes that have arisen from the lyrics and have been categorised (Thompson, 2017). Unitisation of messages is a prerequisite for coding in content analysis, and variations in the unit definition can impact coding choices (De Wever *et al*., 2006). The precise definition of the coding unit is a crucial and essential decision for the researcher (Weber, 1990). Qualitative content analysis employs individual themes as the unit of analysis instead of the physical linguistic units commonly used in quantitative content analysis (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015). Nevertheless, a theme can be conveyed by a solitary word, statement, or phrase (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015) inside the lyrics. When employing themes as coding units, one must seek out the expressions of a concept (Minichiello *et al*., 1990). It is imperative to allocate a code to a written segment representing a theme or subject pertinent to my research questions (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015), which, in the case of my research, are lyrics.

Content analysts commonly employ inference guidelines derived from established theories, prior research, or experience, and coding to interpret material and obtain answers to their research questions (White and Marsh, 2006). In the case of this research, the guidelines are followed by ensuring data alignment with the categories listed earlier, which are informed by the ideas presented in Chapter Two. Qualitative content analysis draws on constructivism across several variations (Drisko and Maschi, 2016). It allows for inductive, deductive (Bengtsson, 2016), or abductive applications (Gheyle and Jacobs, 2017). I employ inductive reasoning within my content analysis,[15] which entails collecting data and constructing a theory based on it (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is characterised by inductive reasoning, where the researcher investigates the meanings and insights inside a specific topic (Strauss and Corbin, 2008; Levitt *et al*., 2017). Using a constructivist approach, this reasoning helps identify patterns and themes (Charmaz, 2014) in the selected lyrics. Categories and a coding protocol have been obtained from empirical data, prior relevant research, and theoretical frameworks. I approached the development of categories and coding schemes inductively because no theories were available that precisely underpin my research questions, aims and objectives.

[15] Constructivists use inductive research and reasoning, combined with qualitative methodologies, including semi-structured interviews (as discussed earlier), observations, and interpretive analysis, to identify recurring patterns and themes within the collected data (Creswell, 2009; Charmaz, 2014).

In research, without existing theories, it is necessary to derive categories inductively from the data (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015). Inductive content analysis is especially suitable for my work because I am developing a theory regarding how UK rap as an African diasporan currency intersects with luxury brands, differing from the US rap context and existing theories made regarding that intersection (Chandler and Chandler-Smith, 2005; Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012; Podoshen *et al*., 2014; Billot *et al*., 2021; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023). While constructing categories inductively from my raw lyrical data, I employed a continual comparative approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as it stimulates original ideas and highlights distinctions across categories (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015). The fundamental principle of the constant comparative approach is twofold: systematically comparing each song assigned to a category with all the songs already assigned to that category to grasp the theoretical characteristics of the category comprehensively. I use this comparative approach to investigate my third research question: Are all lyrical mentions of luxury brand names forms of product and brand placement? This question can only be answered through decoding contexts (Gheyle and Jacobs, 2017) of lyrics and comparing. Throughout this procedure, careful consideration is given to the context in which these messages are conveyed; two similar statements can have different meanings (Gheyle and Jacobs, 2017) in rap lyrics. Two songs might feature lyrics with luxury brand names, but this does not necessarily indicate that they are both cases of product or brand placement. One song may solely reflect luxury brands to enhance a more profound message, such as addressing Black masculinity (hooks, 2003) or femininity constructs (Rose, 1994; Collins, 2000) amplified by materialism (Rose, 1994), for example. The song can, therefore, be interpreted as unintentional product or brand placement, underlining inadvertent celebrity endorsement (Radon, 2012). Conversely, the other song may be by an artist professionally affiliated with the luxury brand they mention, making it more likely to be a lyrical form of product or brand placement (Van Vaerenbergh, 2017; Craig *et al*., 2017; Metcalfe and Ruth, 2020). The second comparative approach is the integrating of categories and their properties by interpretive memos (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2015) to underline facets of aspirational, navigational, social, familial and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) and unpick meanings behind lyrics about luxury brands, heritage, and indications of decolonial statements.

One of the distinguishing features of content analysis is its combination of qualitative (Catanzaro, 1988; Burnard, 1991; Downe-Wambolt, 1992; Berg, 2001) and quantitative (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2004) approaches. While I utilise qualitative content analysis to analyse the meanings and contexts of lyrics, one of my empirical chapters incorporates a chart that enumerates my overarching lyrical content analysis theme, which is to investigate the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay. In Chapter Six, I provide a graph indicating the frequency of luxury brands mentioned in the

UK rap songs selected for analysis to conclude which brands are most mentioned within the final sample of one hundred and twenty-six UK rap songs. However, I acknowledge the qualitative data (lyrical content analysis and semi-structured interviews) as the fundamental essence of my original contribution to knowledge.

4.6 Research method restrictions and considerations

Many UK rappers I contacted are celebrities. The accessibility of celebrities is restricted due to being overloaded with media interviews, which may demotivate them from participating in academic research (Driessens, 2014). Thus, there have been limitations in accessing UK rappers, as I briefly discussed concerning Skepta. Despite networking and getting very close to gaining access to certain rappers, their demanding schedules and hesitance to be interviewed have been limitations. As mentioned, this thesis aimed to interview at least one British-Caribbean rap artist, but I was unsuccessful in securing an interview with those I had contacted. However, they feature in the forty-one UK rap artists that I discussed earlier regarding the content analysis selection. This is important to note because the UK African diaspora consists of people who identify as both Caribbean and African (Asante, 1988; Gilroy, 1993), as I have reiterated throughout the thesis.

Although I originally intended to employ textual analysis, I decided content analysis was better suited for my research for reasons I have discussed in the earlier section. Turner (2010) provides a critical study of the prevalence of textual analysis in celebrity studies. Driessens (2014) concurs with Turner's assessment but acknowledges the lack of alternative approaches. My research demonstrates that content analysis is a feasible method for studying celebrity rap artists, particularly when analysing their lyrics. These lyrics serve as portals to comprehending the identity and messaging of a rap artist. Driessens (2014) proposes that instead of concentrating on the production and consumption of celebrities, which is often still characterised by a textual approach, it is crucial to consider the viewpoint of the active agents in celebrity culture. Incorporating the viewpoint of professionals in the industry might significantly enhance our comprehension of celebrities; in the case of my research, as I have discussed earlier, Lash and Ladoja have been key informants (Yin, 1994, p. 90) and provided remarkable insights through semi-structured interviews that aid in understanding Skepta's identity and his relationship with luxury fashion brands. These restrictions underscore the epistemological position of this study: Within a constructivist paradigm, knowledge is contextually situated and constructed through interaction, rather than extracted from a fixed, objective reality. While positivist approaches might prioritise access to a wide or 'representative' sample to generalise findings, this

research embraces depth over breadth, emphasising meaning-making within specific cultural contexts. Thus, the limited access to certain artists is not a flaw to be corrected, but a reflection of the realities of conducting research in dynamic and gate-kept cultural spaces. I would not term my work a celebrity study; however, I acknowledge the celebrity-induced challenges in gaining access to the rappers I contacted.

4.7 Ethical considerations and factors

As an avid listener of UK rap music, it has been imperative for me, as a researcher, to refrain from any biases. Whether deliberate or inadvertent, research bias can lead to inaccurate and deceptive findings in scientific and sociological studies (Simundic, 2013). As a researcher, I must uphold an impartial viewpoint to generate unbiased findings and ethical contributions during the entire research duration. One factor contributing to the genuine maintenance of this perspective is my birth and upbringing in Kenya. While I listen to UK rap music, I cannot fully relate to the experiences that UK rap artists express or identify concerning the lived experiences of the Black British community because I am not British. Examining the contributions of the African diaspora reveals elements that I can resonate with. Nonetheless, I do not consider myself a member of the UK African diaspora, which helps me navigate potential biases. While I am familiar with certain aspects of the interconnectivity I am researching, such as the significance of familial capital in identity formations, for instance, I must acknowledge that I am an outsider. Bias arises from the researcher's susceptibility to influence, leading to misrepresenting data findings in qualitative research (Polite and Beck, 2014). I am not influenced by UK rap but rather intrigued by it while also appreciating certain aspects that I can identify with or lifestyles that may be desirable. Nevertheless, I am able to perceive those matters neutrally and uphold an outsider's viewpoint to preserve an ethical position.

It must be acknowledged that I am a Black researcher interviewing a collection of Black industry professionals on their perspectives and experiences. Since my participants and I can share some points of view, I can appreciate theirs. As they interact with their data and participants to create understanding, constructivist researchers acknowledge and discuss their subjectivity rather than claim they are objective (Thompson, 2017). Within qualitative research, aspects of trustworthiness are present due to the subjective nature of qualitative research (Galdas, 2017). One can be impartial while still recognising their subjectivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) because, in my case, there are variances, including my upbringing in Kenya, as I have mentioned, and experiencing my Blackness in a

country where I was not the minority. Since most of my interviewees grew up in London, it could be difficult for me as the researcher to grasp or resonate with everything they discuss regarding their experiences of being Black and British. But still, the interviewer effect (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Bryman, 2016; Schmiedeberg and Schröder, 2023) must be reflected upon. This effect refers to a type of bias when an interviewer's attributes, such as age, race or gender, influence the answers provided by the interviewee (King and Horrocks, 2010). It is an ethical consideration to highlight that the Black interviewees may have been more comfortable and enthusiastic about being interviewed by a Black interviewer and contributing to a Black topic (Lavrakas, 2019), indicating the recognition of the lack of Black experiences and perspectives within academia. This is not the researcher's fault; it is a sociological effect that may occur in different life and social scenarios; it is not a hindrance to ensuring my work maintains a standard of ethics.

There was an element of building rapport in securing my research interviews. Also, through the nature of semi-structured interviews, which has an aspect of organic conversation (Swain and Spire, 2020; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), my position as an expert in rap music and luxury fashion allowed me to build on discussions that most likely produced elements of the interviewer effect. Being a PhD researcher added credibility in my reaching out to participants and assisted in my being taken seriously. The mention of academic contribution and the lack of UK rap and luxury fashion exploration in academia also assisted in attracting the interviewees to participate in this study and getting permission to record all interviews. However, there was no unethical closeness in planning the interviews, although I had a professional relationship with Vernon during my styling work experience. As I discussed earlier, interviews were achieved by sending a direct message to participants, even those I did not know personally, explaining my research topic briefly. All interviewees consented to be interviewed verbally or in writing; interview questions could be repeated, skipped and redirected. The recordings were stored on my private hard drive and have been protected and kept confidential throughout my research project. Additionally, participants were told in the interview planning that they would be able to read through the thesis after submission. I also informed participants, prior to the interviews, that I intended to publish this thesis after completion, so they were aware that their insights might be included in a future publication. All selected participants were given the option to remain anonymous, but each consented to being named. As the research does not involve sensitive material, the use of pseudonyms was not necessary. In some cases, qualitative researchers must keep a level of anonymity so that interviews cannot be traced back to the participants (Dougherty, 2021); however, in the case of my work, interviewees gave their permission to be named and were keen about being involved in PhD research. It is essential to note that qualitative researchers typically use

research participants' real names only if they are public officials (Gerrard, 2020). Some of my research participants are public figures notable in the UK rap scene. There are valid reasons and ethical benefits to why a researcher would anonymise the identities of participants, but I chose to keep their names with their consent to create social impact; if the names of people that Black British youth look up to are included in academic literature, this may further enrich resonance, inspiration, and positive cultural impressions.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework that underpins this thesis, demonstrating how a constructivist paradigm, supported by qualitative research methods, is appropriate for examining the relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion brands. In particular, this framework is designed to illuminate how UK rap operates as a cultural currency of the UK African diaspora, and how this intersects with questions of identity, influence, and decolonial expression. Through a combination of semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis of lyrics, this research foregrounds perspectives and insights that are often marginalised in academic discourse. The rationale for selecting each research participant has been provided, highlighting their relevance to the research aims. Furthermore, the processes of data collection and analysis, emphasising reflexivity, contextual interpretation and thematic rigour, have been discussed in detail to ensure transparency and trustworthiness. The chapter has also acknowledged methodological constraints, particularly the challenges of access when researching celebrity figures, as well as ethical considerations surrounding subjectivity, insider/outsider dynamics, and the interviewer effect. These reflections are consistent with a constructivist approach, which recognises that knowledge is co-produced and situated within specific socio-cultural contexts. By combining interviews and lyrical content analysis, this research triangulates data in a way that enhances depth and interpretive validity. These methods work together to offer an original contribution to knowledge regarding the UK rap–luxury fashion nexus and the broader cultural wealth of the UK African diaspora. The following chapter presents the first set of empirical findings and analysis, showing how the methodological strategies outlined here enable new insights into how UK rap artists and cultural intermediaries navigate, shape and resist dominant fashion discourses.

Chapter Five: “We don't fuck with random brands.”

5.1 Introduction

UK rap does not "fuck" with random brands. As Lash asserts in the quote that titles this chapter, rappers do not associate themselves with any brand for the sake; it must align with who they are. This chapter draws on primary interviews conducted for this thesis to critically explore the complex relationship between UK rap and the luxury fashion industry. From the outset, it is necessary to stress that this relationship has evolved through a far more intricate process than simplistic or surface-level readings might suggest. This chapter deliberately moves away from dominant and often reductive discourses of ostentation, "bling," and conspicuous consumption - critiques I addressed and refuted in Chapter Two. Instead, it foregrounds authenticity, resistant, navigational, aspirational and social capital, as well as the cultural significance of UK rap’s subcultural dress practices.

Drawing on insights from Ladoja, Lash, Shaybo, Vernon and Kamara, I begin Chapter Five by discussing product placement and brand mentions, which are discussed not solely as marketing tools but as signifiers of cultural positioning, aspirational capital, and a form of strategic navigation through industry expectations. The chapter then goes on to examine the early beginning, influences and stimuli of the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interrelationship. Here, Ladoja affirms the interconnection as evident and juxtaposes it against UK garage, providing a historical link in understanding UK rap’s unique integration to the luxury fashion universe, in which grime's anarchic yet minimalistic disposition served as a foundation. The chapter then examines fashion week’s relevance in the UK rap and luxury fashion journey. In this discussion, Lash and Ladoja underline the power of club culture and social capital, and how fashion week has been a pivotal catalyst in solidifying UK rappers in the luxury fashion scene.

I then deliberate the devotion to tracksuits in UK rap, which Lash addresses with a focus on working-class experiences. Shaybo then explains why the tracksuit remains a staple regardless of fame, status, success and access to luxury clothing. This section exemplifies how uncompromising UK rap fashion identity is. The tracksuit is a garment of refuge, a constant, unaffected by UK rap's interaction with high-end brands. I then proceed to the discussion of gendered dynamics in UK rap’s relationship with

luxury fashion brands. Drawing on insights from Shaybo, Vernon and Kamara, this section examines how the male-dominated nature of the UK rap industry shapes women's consistent access to luxury fashion brands, drawing on Shaybo's experience. In this section, Shaybo offers a necessary counterpoint to the masculinised landscape of UK rap, while Vernon and Kamara's insights emphasise the stylist's role in shaping visual identity and mediating between creative expression and commercial imperatives. This section highlights how gender, style and authenticity intersect in UK rap's relationship with luxury fashion brands.

I then explore the personal relationships between UK rap artists and luxury brand fashion designers and creative directors, emphasising the significance of social capital in fostering navigational capital and the preservation of the authenticity and identity of UK rappers in business collaborations. Finally, I examine the distinctions between US and UK rap's relationships with luxury brands, as affirmed by Shaybo. Furthermore, I argue that the earlier influence of US hip-hop on UK rap, as discussed by Lash, should not be interpreted simply as imitation; rather, it represents what I define as cross-cultural diasporic resonance.

This chapter posits that UK rap's integration into the luxury fashion sector constitutes a complex journey shaped by three fundamental components: authenticity, relationships and identity. The influence UK rap artists now wield within the luxury space can be traced to these pivotal dynamics. Community cultural wealth and subcultural style practices render this relationship uniquely distinctive. The contributions of Black Britain to the luxury sector, through lyrics (explored in the next chapter), collaborations, runways and front-row presence are both significant and impactful. They reflect the cultural spaces occupied and transformed by Millennial and Gen Z members of the contemporary UK African diaspora (Tulloch, 2016).

5.2 Product Placement in UK rap lyrics

This section examines the complexity of product placement in brand lyrics within the relationship of UK rap and luxury fashion, as affirmed by Ladoja: "Yes, I absolutely think there is a relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion" (See Appendix 2, 00:01:18). Rappers are tastemakers (Cutler, 2013). When it comes to youth style and fashion choices and/or aspirations, UK rappers have an abundance of sway, as Lash affirms: "Like 'Oh yeah … I'm seeing them; them lot are wearing that.

Alright, cool. I trust their vision … I want to wear that'" (See Appendix 1, 00:36:27). Ladoja expands on UK rappers' influence with an example:

> I think that they do influence … I think that that consumer is … especially Gen Z; is really connected to … being part of a trend. … that brand … Van Cleef … that's probably the most popular item of jewellery in the UK right now. … it's an aspirational piece of jewellery for most consumers. … it's an example … it was born from … rap. You know, there's so many lyrics. (See Appendix 2, 00:25:39)

Although this thesis does not centre on consumerism, Lash and Ladoja's assertions underscore the cultural impact of UK rap artists, which subsequently initiates a cascading effect of their influence on luxury consumerism (Billot *et al.*, 2021; Pantin-Sohier *et al.*, 2023) and clothing choices. The rap endorser indicates recognition of their cultural value. Van Cleef Arpels was founded in 1906 when the intersection of luxury with Black individuals in Europe or the United Kingdom was largely unrecognised because of their inclusion within elite social spaces (Fryer, 1984). Like my earlier example of Cartier, the Van Cleef founders could not have anticipated that their brand would later gain significance among younger consumers influenced by rap music. Music is influential among Gen Z groups, with individuals in this demographic averaging four hours of daily listening (Golden, 2019). Rap music underscores its efficacy as a strategic approach for capturing and retaining their attention and interests (ibid.). While there are no available statistics on how much Gen Z listen to UK rap, as articulated by Ladoja, UK rap music has significantly contributed to the popularisation of luxury brands such as Van Cleef Arpels jewellery, establishing a trend that positions a brand with a history of one hundred and eighteen years as appealing to Gen Z audiences today. Van Cleef is referenced in three songs included in the content analysis.

Shaybo's following statement underscores the sonic power of UK rap and how brands recognise this. Her statement is significant to highlight to the reader earlier in this chapter because it contextualises the genre's evolving relationship with luxury, marking a contrast with its earlier, more oppositional stance towards the industry—something Ladoja will go on to elaborate in the next section and in Chapter Seven. Shaybo's observation illustrates how UK rap's once resistant posture has, in part, shifted towards strategic engagement: "UK rappers, we are very influential through our music … brands understand the influence of having rappers speak about their brands" (See Appendix 1.1, 00:03:11). It is vital to not only interrogate the issue of product placement through content analysis, but also through industry perspectives. This quote by Shaybo underscores key considerations

regarding why brands acknowledge the influence UK rappers hold when referencing their products. First, rapper endorsements enhance a luxury brand's image and brand personality (Pantin-Sohier et al., 2023), but they are not always direct spokespeople (Rosengren *et al*., 2013, pp.103–114). Whether directly or indirectly, complimentary or aspirational mentions of luxury brands in UK rappers' lyrics are still forms of celebrity endorsements. The second consideration is the effect of luxury brand mentions in UK rap lyrics resulting from the two stages of the meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989): pre-endorsement, which revolves around meanings, and endorsement, which involves the transfer. A UK rapper represents specific meanings to audiences; through an endorsement, whether indirectly or directly, the rapper transfers the meanings they represent to the luxury brand (McCracken, 1989) that they mention. UK rappers typically represent meanings related to authenticity (Miller, 2011).

Product placement in music refers to the deliberate integration of branded goods or company names into artistic content for marketing purposes, typically involving payment or endorsement (Burkhalter, Thornton, & Graham, 2012). This commercial practice has long existed in popular music, particularly in genres such as hip-hop and rap (Marshall, 2006; Negus, 1999), where artists frequently reference high-end fashion labels, cars and other luxury goods (Frith, 2004; Sullivan, 2021), as discussed in Chapter Two. However, in the context of UK rap, such mentions are not always the result of formal partnerships or marketing deals, as the reader will notice in Chapter Six. Instead, these mentions often function as expressive tools that help artists construct narratives around success, struggle, aspiration (Forman, 2002; Adamson, 2019) and cultural identity (Pinn, 2015; Basu, 2020). To conflate all brand mentions with product placement is to overlook the rich symbolic and cultural work performed by these lyrical gestures. Shaybo shares insights on luxury brand mentions in UK rap lyrics:

> Brands are mentioned … for two reasons: the artist could just love the brand and just want to build a relationship with that brand by mentioning them. But most of the time, brands actually pay the artist to mention them. … Brands … understand how far music travels. … with music, sonically, it reaches a wider demographic because if you look at people's streams, it's about 63 million, 70 million and 120 million … So when you are mentioning Fendi, Balenciaga … naturally, it's in their minds because music travels further. That's why they pay for product placement. It's just a part of marketing for the brands and the artists. So, it's just a way to get a cheque basically (See Appendix 1.1, 00:09:50 -00:10:32).

Shaybo's statement underlines four important points. First, irrespective of the motive, lyrical brand mentions in songs are forms of marketing and promotion; they are alternative forms of advertising (Clay and Bichard, 2019). Product placement offers a form of subtle and indirect promotion, allowing for marketing to occur without overtly appearing as such (Wipperfurth, 2005). Second, when luxury brands pay artists to mention them, that is a form of celebrity endorsement (McCracken, 1989; Okonkwo, 2007; Billot *et al*., 2021), which I discussed earlier, rooted in the enticing appeal of celebrity culture (Miller, 2011, p. 156), and rappers being deemed as cool (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023), therefore the brands they refer to are cool (ibid.). The incorporation of branded lyrics can serve as a significant advertising mechanism, helping to cultivate positive perceptions of luxury brands (Chou and Lien, 2010). UK rappers who engage in product placement may also attract the attention of brands and establish commercially beneficial relationships. Such associations can enhance their own cultural capital, while also benefiting the brands through implied endorsement (Keller, 1993; Karrh, 1998). Drawing on McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer model, product placement operates as a socialisation agent, much like music itself (Homer, 2009; Bountin-Foster *et al*., 2006). Third, the sonic power and butterfly effect of lyrical brand mentions are invaluable; references to brands in UK rap lyrics are highly effective forms of product or brand placement (Pardun, 2003). This type of intentional product placement offers great value for money, as it involves a single payment by the brand for a song that can be consumed over many years (Karrh, 1998; Karisik, 2014) through millions of streams (Meinecke *et al*., 2021); highlighting that luxury brands exploit (Miller, 2011, p. 119) rappers' sonic and cultural influence. This dynamic constitutes an unfair exchange, as the brand continues to benefit from the artist's long-term cultural capital without equitable compensation. For example, a highly streamed song that features luxury brand names may be culturally relevant for ten years. Would luxury brands pay rappers what equates to the longevity of such priceless marketing? I highly doubt it. Lastly, not all UK rap lyrical brand mentions are forms of product or brand placement, irrespective of whether they are in an aspirational context. As Shaybo points out, some rappers mention brands simply because they like them. I have already established earlier in this chapter that UK rappers value authenticity, and as the reader will see, UK rappers view authenticity as paramount, as discussed in Skepta's case study later in this thesis. The use of product placement in a cultural art form that is deemed authentic (Williams, 2007) risks losing credibility (High, 2009). Despite lyrical brand mentions, UK rappers can use their songs to express opinions and attitudes and communicate emotions (Pettijohn & Sacco, 2009), demonstrated in Chapter Six, thus serving as a form of communication (Ibid.), of identity, aspirations, background and experiences, which the mentioning of luxury brands simply amplifies. However, business is business. For some rappers, financial gain can

take precedence over authenticity, resulting in a disconnect between the brand and their personal identity. As Shaybo puts it, it's "just a way to get a cheque." A rapper might not genuinely connect with the brand; they just want the deal. Still, brand mentions in lyrics are subjective and powerful, regardless of whether they reflect sincere alignment or strategic commercial intent.

As UK rap grows increasingly commercialised and globally visible, the boundary between product placement and cultural expression becomes increasingly porous (Maguire and Matthews, 2012). The commodification of street style (Hebdige, 1979; Clark, 2020) and the fashion industry's 'embrace' of Black aesthetics (Tulloch, 2010; Johnson, 2014) complicates the motives behind brand mentions in rap lyrics. Luxury brands, now more than ever, recognise the marketing potential of rap culture (Williams and Kibby, 2020) and often pursue collaborations that blur the line between endorsement and authenticity (McLeod, 1999) as a form of neuromarketing (Yoon *et al*., 2006). As Marshall (2013) and Banet-Weiser (2012) argue, the modern celebrity operates within "brand cultures," where the distinction between identity and commodity is increasingly difficult to untangle. For UK rappers, this dynamic means that even when brand mentions are not paid endorsements, they still influence consumer behaviour and brand perception (Chou and Lien, 2010; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023).

The significance of both product placement and non-product placement brand mentions must be foregrounded early in Chapter Five to enable readers to grasp the cultural and commercial stakes of such references. In UK rap, the mention of a brand name is seldom neutral; it carries layered meanings related to identity, class, race and aspiration. These layers are especially salient in a postcolonial British context, where the cultural practices of Black youth are frequently pathologised or commodified (Back, 1996; Hall, 1997). As such, understanding the dual function of brand mentions as both aesthetic devices and commercial opportunities is essential for analysing UK rap's cultural currency. It also reveals how artists strategically navigate the terrain between market demands and cultural authenticity.

Popularity and iconicity are key factors contributing to audiences' perception of authenticity; however, popularity and iconic status challenge fundamental principles that audiences regard as authentic, specifically, the pursuit of social worth rather than commercial gain (Verhaal and Dobrev, 2020). Another meaning[16] UK rappers embody is coolness (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023). The appeal of being cool has been characterised as progressively transcending cultural boundaries (Haselstein, 2013,

[16] The meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989) has been discussed earlier in this section.

p. 7). Through luxury brand mentions, rappers can transcend cultural barriers such as language (Mooij, 2004, p. 4), challenging normal global marketing mediums, and proving to be effective because rap music is the most streamed genre on platforms such as Spotify (Meinecke *et al*., 2021). Rappers can, therefore, enhance luxury brands' abilities to engage with rap audiences by creating a connection between their audiences and the mentioned brands (Thomson, 2006; Ilicic and Webster, 2011; Rosengren *et al*., 2013), presenting brands as desirable as a result of resonance in aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), particularly for working-class listeners. Luxury brand references in songs profoundly impact UK rap listeners, as they inspire cultural goals (Merton, 1938, pp.672–682; Braithwaite, 1980).[17] Thus, luxury fashion brands benefit from being mentioned in UK rap lyrics. The effect of these brand mentions in UK rap establishes the cultural value of the UK African diaspora's creative expressions.

The use of luxury brand names in UK rap should be interpreted through the lens of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) rather than solely through economic transactions (Miller, 2011; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023; Kelly, 2016). UK rap's engagement with luxury brands must be situated within the socio-political realities of Black British youth because these artists often come from working-class backgrounds (Back, 1996; Hall *et al*., 2013) where access to elite consumer goods is limited. When they reference high-fashion items in their art, it can be understood as an act of aspirational realism (Ibrahim, 2020) that reflects both their material aspirations and their critique of socio-economic exclusion (Yosso, 2005). The act of naming luxury brands becomes a way to reclaim power and assert cultural presence. This usage aligns with this thesis' idea of cultural currency: where style, linguistic wealth and consumption practices serve as markers of social capital within specific communities (Thornton, 1995; Skeggs, 2004).

Now that the thesis has examined product placement and brand mentions as expressions of cultural currency that luxury brands benefit from, it turns to explore UK rap's earlier relationship with luxury fashion. This involves a comparative analysis with its stylistic predecessor, highlighting shifts in representation, access, and intention. The topic of product placement will be revisited in the context of content analysis in Chapter Six.

[17] Merton's theory posits that every community in the West has a set of significant cultural goals that serve as a basis for aspirations with objectives of material wealth, as seen in luxury brand lyrical mentions (Merton, 1938, pp.672–682).

5.3 “It went from that to the extreme opposite.”

To contextualise the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay, it is useful to consider a precursor within Black British music that established notable affiliations with luxury fashion, thereby providing both a historical point of comparison and a cultural foundation for the emergence of UK rap. Throughout the nineties and early two-thousands, grime and UK rap precursor, UK Garage (Fatsis, 2018), displayed a relationship with luxury fashion brands (Charles, 2022), serving as an example of how a Black British music genre and subculture (Pearson, 2015) intertwined with luxury clothing:

> When you think about UK music, even just historically from like UK garage culture, … I'd say there was phases. So, before grime … UK rap and grime is that period that you're talking about; 2015, which is really pivotal. Just before that came UK garage and UK garage was pretty much all based on … the luxury flex … really about … young artists, young Black artists in particular, looking expensive and the whole genre was based on … buying designer clothes; they'd call them off keys. So, like Moschino off keys, Versace, you know, going to the club, popping champagne, driving Audis, it was a real era in music, which kind of pioneered that like Black luxury music style, which I think, you know, if you look at the iterations of how it goes, it went from that to the extreme opposite. (See Appendix 2, 00:01:18)

Ladoja’s comprehensive account outlines why we must acknowledge UK garage in this study; UK rap has illustrated opposite facets. In UK garage, there are clear indications of conspicuous consumption (Fatsis, 2018; Charles, 2022); wearing luxury brands (Charles, 2022), popping champagne (Fatsis, 2018) and “looking expensive” (Pearson, 2015). UK rap’s initial polarity to UK garage that Ladoja underscores is a result of its youth-subcultural core (Dedman, 2011), critiquing and resisting mainstream values (Hall and Jefferson, 1976, p.10) and thus conveying social codes and symbols through dress (Lurie, 1981) and demeanour as a hidden transcript (Scott, 1990; Rose, 1994) to symbolise resistance to the luxury brands that UK garage ‘prescribed’. Hebdige (1979) asserts that every subculture undergoes an identical trajectory, initially due to a shared resistance. The propagation and abidance of UK rap music’s youth-subcultural foundation elicited a slow-burning acceptance within the luxury fashion world. Ladoja highlights the barriers to acceptance that UK rap faced in the luxury fashion sector:

> I think that UK rap was never sexy music. You know, people … didn't play it. They didn't play it in those rooms. It wasn't something that was like, oh I'm gonna go and play some … UK rap, because half the time they didn't understand what they were saying and … the songs were not what they are now. (See Appendix 2, 00:15:55)

Black cultural production (Gilroy, 1993), stemming from urban, working-class backgrounds, often faces exclusion from 'high' cultural arenas (Hebdige, 1979; Mercer, 1994). This pattern is exacerbated by the manner in which luxury brands perpetuate their affiliation with high culture through the deployment of symbols, aesthetics and practices that resonate with the values historically associated with elite social strata (Veblen, 1899; Bourdieu, 1984; McCracken, 1988; Lipovetsky *et al*., 1994). Luxury brands selectively engage with Black and urban cultural resources primarily to leverage these associations for the purpose of reaching youthful and diverse demographics, thereby enhancing their street credibility and perceived coolness (Miller, 2011; Billot *et al*., 2021; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023) as stated in Chapter Two. Ladoja's insights highlight the initial hesitance of luxury spaces embracing UK rap, mirroring their earlier response to US hip-hop (Romero, 2012). The countercultural origins of grime music, characterised by its raw sound and antagonistic lyrics (Hancox, 2018), likely contributed to the unwelcoming nature of the luxury space towards UK rap music. Its founding in urban rebellion (ibid.) and its articulation of disillusionment with mainstream societal norms (Boakye, 2017) stand in stark contrast to the ideals of refinement and exclusivity that luxury brands seek to convey (Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012). Countercultural movements such as hip-hop were perceived as oppositional to corporate and luxury interests, especially during its raw nascent phases (Rose, 1994; Chang, 2005; Morgan and Bennett, 2011). As I stated in Chapter Two, UK rap is a cross-pollination of countercultural and subcultural facets. Luxury brands have shown notable hesitance to align themselves with such movements, apprehensive that such associations may adversely affect their brand image (Frank, 1997). However, as Ladoja emphasises, UK rap songs have evolved significantly from earlier iterations. This thesis argues that the appeal of "cool" (Frank, 1997) and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in UK rap increasingly garnered recognition and appreciation between 2014 and 2024.

Albeit the stark contrast previously articulated by Ladoja, which highlighted the earlier divergence between UK garage and UK rap in relation to luxury fashion brands, it is evident that present-day UK rap and luxury fashion have become interlocked. This is a point that Ladoja also corroborated at the start of this section. Shaybo addresses how she views UK rap artists engaging with luxury brands today:

> It's a status thing … for male rappers. For example, Fredo, Dave and all these people … you're always gonna see them in some type of designer drip. Some type of designer outfit … it's just for them to say, "I'm more status, I can afford to get these things" … So, when people go into the fashion world, especially … artists, they kind of just want to show off; show that I'm wearing the new designer … that's not in stores yet. The designer that's … off the runway ... So, it's just like a status thing most of the time (See Appendix 1.1, 00:12:43)

While Shaybo's comments underline notions of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) and materialism being closely related to how UK rappers use luxury brands through dress (Rose, 2008, p. 133-136; Hunter, 2011; Podoshen *et al*., 2014), status and conspicuousness can be separate constructs (Visser, 2015); conspicuousness through dress can serve other purposes beyond status signalling. I argue that the foundational elements of UK rap continue to embody a countercultural and subcultural disposition, reflecting a disenchantment of mainstream values (Boakye, 2017). When UK rappers wear luxury brands, we can consider the underlying motivations related to status; nonetheless, this phenomenon is fundamentally rooted in social mobility, given the working-class origins of UK rap (Bramwell, 2011; 2015). For Black people to attain status, they must manoeuvre through the complexities of social mobility, which are driven by a systematically racist social structure (Gilbert *et al*., 2022). We must remember that luxury brands filter and measure social status through pricing strategies, which are often tailored to wealthy consumers (McAllister, 2023). Consequently, given that a significant proportion of rap artists come from working-class backgrounds, it follows that they do not 'originally' constitute the target audience for luxury brands. The attainment of success among rappers, enabling them to transition from aspirants to consumers of luxury brands, signifies a shift in their socio-economic situation. This transformation has a domino effect on both their inter-generational and intra-generational mobility (Bourdieu, 1984; Dyson, 2007; Rose, 2008; Romero, 2012). Luxury brands, therefore, serve as a mechanism for rap artists to demonstrate their social mobility, which is also corroborated by Shaybo's remark about the message male UK rappers convey through their luxury apparel: "I can afford to get these things". Conversely, I propose that establishing status for UK rappers is predominantly derived from their affiliations with the luxury fashion industry, mainly through associations with the luxury fashion world through involvement in fashion week or related events rather than simply donning luxury items.

In sum, the historical and cultural lineage from UK garage to UK rap illustrates a shifting terrain of Black British musical engagement with luxury fashion. Whereas UK garage celebrated conspicuous consumption (Fatsis, 2018; Charles, 2022), UK rap emerged from a youth-subcultural context defined by resistance to dominant norms (Dedman, 2011; Hall and Jefferson, 1976), initially rejecting luxury signifiers as markers of elite exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984; Veblen, 1899). As Ladoja notes (Appendix 2, 00:15:55), UK rap lacked cultural capital in elite spaces, echoing Gilroy's (1993) observation that Black cultural production is frequently marginalised within hegemonic systems of taste. Shaybo's reflections (Appendix 1.1, 00:12:43) confirm how luxury brands have come to symbolise status and visibility, yet this performance is inseparable from broader dynamics of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) and the pursuit of social mobility against racialised class structures (Gilbert *et al*., 2022). As Romero (2012), Dyson (2007), and Rose (2008) argue in the context of US hip-hop, luxury affiliation for Black artists can simultaneously reflect systemic critique and material empowerment. In the UK context, UK rap's eventual embrace by luxury fashion is less a straightforward adoption than a renegotiation; where artists articulate both subcultural resistance and aspirational belonging (Frank, 1997; Miller, 2011; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023). Ultimately, luxury becomes a complex site of performance; a means to assert legitimacy, cultural capital and mobility. This contested space, as Chapter Seven will explore, is exemplified in the career of Skepta, who offers a rich and nuanced case through which to explore how UK rap artists strategically navigate, critique and reshape the rap interplay with luxury fashion.

5.4 "But now we're in the shows"

Fashion Week serves as an essential platform through which rap artists establish their presence and engagement within the luxury fashion domain. It also represents a sphere of recognition beyond the parameters of the rap industry, as Ladoja elaborates:

> If you look at one of Skepta's lyrics in *Shutdown*, yeah, he said, went to Fashion Week, it's shutdown. That's really important for him because, you know, being accepted into, like, the Fashion Week parties being accepted into like that world; being paid to DJ, being paid to perform, it's a different acceptance … Before that point, everyone was kind of on the outside of it. They … were just consumers. (See Appendix 2, 00:06:03)

The involvement of UK rap artists in Fashion Week has shifted their role from mere consumers or aspirants to key players in the fashion world, an effect that I contend is attributable to the dynamics of social capital (Yosso, 2005) within both the music (Aydin-Ozturk, 2018) and fashion (Huggard *et al*., 2022) industries. In the luxury fashion sector context, social capital has emerged as a necessary resource for brands, serving as a central element in formulating contemporary luxury ideologies (ibid.). Fashion Week and nightclubs have been pivotal platforms within the immersion of UK rap and luxury fashion brands, highlighting social capital. Club culture has been a terrain for subcultures (Gelder and Thornton, 1997) and a space where dress and music genres intertwine (Kim, 2010). UK rap as a subculture (Dedman, 2011) is no different. The impact of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005) is evident through the emphasis on socialising and networking at Paris Fashion Week parties and through club culture, which Ladoja highlights:

> There was a club called Pompom that was run by … Charaf, who's the creative director of Casablanca. It came from club culture and partying … everyone would go. We would go there, we would see A$AP Rocky, we would see Virgil, we would see Kanye, we would see everyone during fashion week because it was a way for people to celebrate … hang out … go to some shows that they liked. But just have that kind of unity together. So, I would say that those kinds of things were really important … Virgil played a big part in that. (See Appendix 2, 00:07:02).

When referring to social capital, I draw on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model rather than Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital. As established in Chapter Two, her concept specifically addresses the community resources and connections needed to establish a network that aids marginalised people of colour in achieving success, which Ladoja's account underlines. Clubbing and nightlife contribute to social capital (Grazian, 2009, pp. 908-917); urban Black individuals employ nightclubs as a means to mitigate racial segregation (Hunter, 2010). Black UK rappers can strategically utilise nightclubs to leverage their socioeconomic aspirations and strengthen their social networks (Ibid.); they have successfully used nightclubs such as Le Pompom for exposure and as a networking ground to immerse themselves into the luxury fashion scene and fortify their social capital.

Through the power of social capital, the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion has manifested on the runway. The transition from rappers to cultural figures and muses in the fashion world, specifically seen at Paris Fashion Week, is evident. "Being around Paris Fashion Week … the parties

and stuff we used to go to; but now we're in the shows. We're getting invited to the shows" (See Appendix 1, 00:02:58). Lash's account illustrates how social capital through parties as discussed earlier has aided in UK rappers now being models on the runway, which Ladoja corroborates: "That shift with the artist has followed through … Dave[18] now is walking for Louis Vuitton" (See Appendix 2, 00:04:55). Fashion shows serve as crucial means of communication and marketing (Nadzeya Kalbaska *et al*., 2019, pp.227–237) and are a cultural-economic, socio-spatial and media-related phenomenon (Wang, 2022) with one of the fundamentals being the model (Nadzeya Kalbaska *et al*., 2019, pp.227–237) causing a spectacle effect (Duggan, 2001). I argue that a notable UK rapper such as Dave, being a model on the Louis Vuitton runway, is a spectacle for audiences; it enhances the brand's personality, gives the brand street credibility (Miller, 2011), and solidifies UK rappers as being influential for luxury brand promotion and marketing.

Paris Fashion Week, parties, and club culture facilitate social mobility. Accessing exclusive spaces in the luxury world elevates class experiences and one's social hierarchy position (Dion and Borraz, pp. 67-85, 2017). UK rap artists have accessed these exclusive spaces through their cultural wealth: social, aspirational, and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), thus expediting their social mobility and, consequently, their status. For UK rap audiences (Clay, 2003), particularly those from working-class backgrounds, seeing high-profile UK rappers recognised in exclusive luxury spaces has a significant impact. The presence of such artists at fashion shows helps brands remain aspirational to younger groups from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Stephens and Few, 2007). This effect is rooted in rap music, consistently playing a meaningful role in Black youth culture (Rose, 1994; Clay, 2003; Stephens and Few, 2007), serving as a means for young Black people to make sense of their social world (Rose 1994; Clay 2003; Stephens and Few 2007; Lee 2010). Becker and Sweet (2018) state that individuals from lower socio-economic groups often conform to rap hustler tropes and use hip-hop's commercial success to achieve social mobility. In the context of my research, I acknowledge that UK rappers accelerate their social mobility and status by being in exclusive spaces in the luxury fashion scene and being key spectacles at fashion shows, whether as models (Duggun, 2001) or being seated in the front row (Romero, 2012). At fashion shows, being seated in the front row is widely regarded as a marker of cultural capital, industry status and influence (Bourdieu, 1984; Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). The front row is traditionally reserved for celebrities, fashion editors, brand executives and key cultural figures whose presence is both performative and strategic (Rocamora, 2002). As Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) argue, fashion weeks are not only industry events but also powerful sites of symbolic

[18] Dave is a popular UK rap artist who is featured in the final sample of the content analysis for this study.

production, where visibility translates into legitimacy and status. For UK rap artists, front-row seating represents more than just access; it signifies their acceptance and recognition within elite fashion circuits that have historically excluded Black cultural figures (Tulloch, 2016). This spatial positioning thus becomes a public assertion of both style and status, aligning with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of distinction, where cultural taste operates as a form of social power. In this sense, front-row visibility becomes an embodied expression of influence for UK rappers, offering symbolic validation of the artist's aesthetic authority and commercial relevance. Thus, I propose that such 'spectacles' also demonstrate effective upward social mobility.

The upward social mobility from being a luxury brand spectacle seemed to begin in Paris for UK rappers, as both Ladoja and Lash accentuate that UK rap artists first went to Paris Fashion Week and parties instead of London Fashion Week and London-based clubs. This is ironic; how were London-born and bred rappers valued in the Paris fashion turf before London? This irony suggests initial barriers for rappers being represented at London Fashion Week due to discrimination (Day, 2008). It highlights the effects of the notorious racist nightclubs in London, which have historically been identified as social problems (Talbot and Böse, pp. 95-118, 2007). Additionally, the covert and overt criminalisation of UK rap (Fatsis, 2018; Fatsis, 2019) and Black British youth, music and culture in London (Talbot and Böse, pp. 95-118, 2007) underscore the irony for UK rap artists being valued in the Paris luxury fashion scene before London. Luxury brands in London were reverberating the systematic racism that Britain birthed, holding on to demonisations and stereotypes of UK rap. In contrast, Paris-based luxury fashion brands welcomed UK rappers, playing a key role in the UK rap and luxury fashion intersection.[19]

In the same way that luxury brands are leveraging rap music (Miller, 2011), rappers are using Fashion Week to build their personal brands. UK rappers use Fashion Week as a platform to gain publicity for their projects, as Lash states: "If you wanna drop a new tune, if you're about to do something creative as a rapper, especially in UK … you'll go Fashion Week" (See Appendix 1, 00:09:05). Rappers benefit from the limelight at Fashion Week, which positively affects their projects. Fashion shows provide brands with substantial visibility both online and offline (Kalbaska *et al*., 2019, pp.227–237). UK rappers can use Fashion Week (and fashion shows) as an offline marketing medium.

[19] Although Paris is known for racism (Cook, 1939) the presence of US rap artists and cultural figures in Paris may have played a role in the seamless integration of UK rap artists in the Paris fashion scene and club culture.

To conclude, the intersection of UK rap and Fashion Week reflects a broader shift in how Black British artists strategically harness social capital to navigate exclusionary luxury spaces, transforming from marginalised consumers to central figures of influence and legitimacy (Yosso, 2005; Huggard *et al*., 2022). Fashion Week becomes both a stage and a symbol: a performative space where status is negotiated through visibility (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006), and where rappers, through their presence, disrupt the traditional hierarchies of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). The participation of UK rap artists, whether as models (Duggan, 2001), front-row guests (Rocamora, 2002) or performers (Appendix 2, 00:06:03), reframes notions of prestige and reshapes the cultural 'grammar' of luxury (Miller, 2011). Drawing on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model enables us to foreground how Black artists mobilise aspirational, social and navigational capital to achieve upward mobility and cultural influence. Club culture and nightlife, long identified as critical spaces for subcultural expression and racial negotiation (Gelder and Thornton, 1997; Hunter, 2010), further solidify this trajectory, with venues like Le Pompom serving as informal but powerful hubs of transnational fashion-rap convergence (Appendix 2, 00:07:02). The irony that UK rappers gained legitimacy in Paris before London underscores the persistence of structural racism and cultural gatekeeping within Britain's own fashion industry (Day, 2008; Talbot and Böse, 2007). Yet, this marginalisation is precisely what renders UK rap's presence at Fashion Week so significant: it marks a counternarrative of visibility, self-branding and symbolic elevation. In turn, UK rappers are not only using Fashion Week to extend their commercial reach (Kalbaska *et al*., 2019), but also to reconfigure the cultural economy of luxury; affirming their own aesthetic authority while simultaneously challenging Eurocentric structures of exclusivity (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). This section has thus shown how the performance of cultural capital at Fashion Week is more than a symbolic spectacle; it is an articulation of Black British social mobility, artistry and power.

5.5 "When I'm wearing tracksuits … they'll move towards me"

This thesis focuses on luxury brands, but we cannot discuss UK rap without interrogating the prominence of the tracksuit; it is an integral co-ord in UK rap culture as discussed in Chapter Two. It represents the subcultural attire of UK rap. Every subculture possesses a distinct dress style and uses clothing to declare individuality and identity (Hebdige, 1979). In particular, youth and music-oriented subcultures utilise clothing to represent their way of life, values, uniqueness and individuality (Miles, 2000), as well as convey their perspectives (Sklar *et al*., 2021). UK rap, as both a youth subculture (Dedman, 2011) and subculture more broadly (Fatsis, 2018; Williams, 2020), has claimed the tracksuit as its own. The tracksuit functions as a cultural and social identifier, as well as a symbolic

representation that helps express an individual's identity (Tajuddin, 2018) and UK rap's fashion identity (Turney, 2019). Fashion is used as a medium for class distinctions (Appleford, 2015); as Lash's statement indicates:

> "When we're growing up in London, UK, rap or not rap, just generally because a lot of rappers are just people growing up in estates in London; we don't really wear high fashion that much. We have a tracksuit"[20] (See Appendix 1, 00:02:08 – 00:02:40).

Subcultures have been meaningful in working-class groups (Williams and Hannerz, 2014), and are shared representations of social groups, characterised by shared symbols and meanings, fostering a sense of unity (Bell, 2010), which UK rap demonstrates through the 'faithfulness' to the tracksuit. It is an ensemble that provides a sense of belonging and is a subcultural and fashionable co-ord central to the youth in working-class communities in London, which Lash delivers a more profound understanding of.

For numerous individuals, the tracksuit represents a comfortable sportswear ensemble (Appleford, 2015; Ziemele *et al*., 2018; Wei *et al*., 2023); for others, it serves as a symbol of working-class identity (Appleford, 2015); and yet for others, it evokes negative connotations, leading to prejudice and unconscious bias. Lash discusses the tracksuit as a simple and affordable garment, which should not be negatively racialised or stereotyped (Rahman, 2016, pp. 111–133), nor used to unfairly target Black youth, as this contributes to the demonisation of UK rap, particularly its subgenre UK drill (Fatsis, 2019). I find that UK rap's allegiance to the tracksuit has transformed it from being solely associated with working-class communities to being perceived as cool and influential, prompting luxury fashion brands to glamorise the tracksuit and athleisure (Savić *et al*., 2020; Kaur and Gupta, 2023). This, in a sense, gentrifies the tracksuit and exemplifies the trickle-up theory (Blumberg, 1970), marking a merging of subcultural and countercultural dress.

Rappers wearing tracksuits induce a sense of relatability for their demographics, creating a deeper sense of collective resonance through clothing. Shaybo concurs by stating: "When I'm wearing tracksuits, and I'm just dressed normal, I feel like … they'll move towards me and they're more … warm

[20] Although streetwear is relevant within the discussion of rap music, this thesis focuses primarily on tracksuits in that dimension. See Romero (2012) for more on streetwear and hip-hop/rap music.

towards me" (See Appendix 1.1, 00:15:28). Clothing is a form of communication (Lurie, 1981; Barnard, 1996; Entwistle, 2015). When rappers wear tracksuits, their audiences are assured that they share similarities, an unspoken bond through clothing (Toporišič and Čuden, 2014), and an induced sense of cultural meaning (McCracken, 1988). Shaybo continues by using Central Cee[21] as an example:

> So that's why you see somebody like Central Cee, he's a multi-millionaire, but he's still in tracksuits because he knows his demographic wants somebody that's relatable to them … He could easily go and buy … Prada or Louis Vuitton, but he knows that his fan base are usually young people in tracksuits. So that's why he sticks to the tracksuits. (See Appendix 1.1, 00:15:28)

Relatability through clothing elevates the cultural influence of UK rappers on their audiences,[22] denoting facets of the fashion adoption theory (Sproles, 1979), as well as the meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989). The social dimension of fashion adoption is when individuals pursue approval and validation from their peers; this is connected to the "support-seeking" (Sproles, 1979) facet of fashion decisions, as seen in how the tracksuit is a relatable ensemble. The root of the relatability that Shaybo underlines is the pursuit of social acceptance via choices in clothing and adherence to fashion trends (ibid.). The social and cultural influence is attributed to celebrity (McCracken, 1989) UK rappers. Their wearing of tracksuits cause individuals, particularly from working-class groups, to resonate and receive a profound sense of validation (Sproles, 1979), which Shaybo's earlier statement indicates. Shaybo's example underscores the significance of relatability between UK rappers and their audiences. Despite their financial success and available resources, UK rappers frequently exhibit a steadfast allegiance to their socio-economic origins by staying loyal to their subcultural dress (Hebdige, 1979), which embodies authenticity and preserves their identity. To preserve UK rap's subcultural identity amidst assimilation, rappers emphasise authenticity through characteristics such as being 'underground,' 'from the street,' and 'staying true to oneself' (Harrison, 2008, p. 1788). In response to Entwistle's (2015, p. 111) questioning of whether "fashion conceals the 'authentic' self and serves as 'artifice'", in the context of UK rap, rappers demonstrate their authenticity through the deliberate choice of tracksuits, a garment deeply intertwined with the street culture of London. We can underline

[21] Central Cee is a successful UK rap artist. Although he is not a member of the UK African diaspora, he collaborates with many Black UK rap artists. His music illustrates working-class experiences which are not limited to Black people.

[22] Although I do not conduct field work with audiences or consumers, audiences are referred to throughout the empirical chapters to exemplify related arguments.

this by the choice of wearing the tracksuit despite it being criminalised (Parker, 2022). Authenticity is necessary for UK rappers to effectively engage their target demographics, as audiences actively construct meaning in their lives by embracing or dismissing the social values represented by a UK rapper (Meyers, pp. 890-892, 2009). The tracksuit elicits a sense of connection, nostalgia (Marroncelli, 2024), and authenticity by maintaining connection to humble beginnings through attire.

To conclude, while UK rap's proximity to luxury fashion continues to intensify, the enduring symbolism of the tracksuit reflects the genre's steadfast allegiance to its subcultural roots (Hebdige, 1979; Fatsis, 2019). Far from being a superficial wardrobe choice, the tracksuit operates as a cultural signifier that communicates authenticity, working-class solidarity and resistance to dominant aesthetic norms (Appleford, 2015; Rahman, 2016). Its persistence within UK rap underscores the continued relevance of subcultural dress as a form of political and cultural expression (Sklar *et al.*, 2021; Williams and Hannerz, 2014), while also exemplifying the role of fashion in producing and maintaining group identity (Entwistle, 2015; McCracken, 1988). Even as rappers participate in aspirational circuits (Ong, 2006) and luxury collaborations, their fidelity to this ensemble foregrounds a form of embodied authenticity; what Meyers (2009) describes as the active negotiation of credibility and meaning in popular culture. In this way, the tracksuit remains a visible assertion of UK rap's subcultural ethos, signalling that, despite commercialisation or intersections with elite spaces, its core identity remains grounded in lived experience, street-based codes (Hebdige, 1979) and stylistic resistance.

5.6 Gendered realities and the stylist's role in UK Rap

The rap industry remains a predominantly male-dominated space (Rose, 1994; Zamani-Gallaher and Polite, 2013, pp. 257–276; McMillan, 2022). This dominance is reflected in Shaybo and Ladoja's consistent references to UK male rappers when discussing the relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion. This section draws on my interview with Shaybo to present a female UK rapper perspective. Shaybo offers insights into how UK rap artists navigate relationships with luxury fashion brands, the implications for career development, and the gendered dynamics at play in shaping a rapper's public image. While the inclusion of a female voice inevitably brings Black feminine understandings into view, the intent is not to isolate this lens, but to foreground the broader spectrum of perspectives a Black female rapper brings, including her views on the male-dominated industry she operates within, and its intersection with the luxury fashion sector.

The visual presentation of UK rappers is deeply gendered, as Shaybo highlights when discussing the different expectations placed on male and female artists in relation to fashion:

> Most of the male artists, it's like 'I need to get the new trainers. I need to get the new jeans. I need to get the new T-shirts', type of thing. But for the females, it's very rare, which is why you don't see a lot of females in the UK industry wearing all the Gucci's and the Prada's … because … It's very hard to maintain" (See Appendix 1.2, 00:14:31).

Here, Shaybo gestures toward the structural inequalities that shape female visibility (Cooper, 2013; Morgan, 2015) in UK rap. Whereas male rappers may access and flaunt luxury fashion more frequently (Frith & McRobbie, 1990; Miller, 2020), female artists face higher pressures in terms of both aesthetic upkeep and financial sustainability (Weidhase, 2015; Gill, 2007). These gendered inequalities intersect with broader dynamics of class and race (Crenshaw, 1989; Saha, 2018), limiting access to luxury branding as a form of cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Skeggs, 2004). Shaybo's comment also highlights the symbolic burden female rappers face: they are expected to look both the part and maintain creative credibility (hooks, 1992; Pough, 2004), often without the same institutional support or brand recognition afforded to their male counterparts. Such a disparity helps explain why some male UK rappers pursue high-end fashion items with such intensity. I propose that the adversities encountered by Black UK male rappers serve as a catalyst for their desire to acquire the most current luxury products, as a means of asserting that they have 'made it' and rebuking the social marginalisation they experience (Noble, 2022; Yosso, 2005). Within this logic, luxury fashion becomes an aspirational signifier (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006; Crane, 2012); a visual shorthand for overcoming adversity, achieving success, and reconfiguring one's place in a society that often excludes Black masculinity from narratives of legitimacy and prestige (Fanon, 1952; Wallace, 2020).

The gendered disparity in luxury fashion brand access and upkeep also underscores the importance of stylists as key cultural intermediaries in the UK rap industry. Stylists must carefully navigate this terrain while brokering access to luxury fashion houses, especially for female UK rap artists, who often lack the institutional recognition granted to their male peers, as Shaybo discussed. Stylists do more than assemble outfits; they shape narratives (McRobbie, 2015) of authenticity, aspiration (Entwistle, 2009; Rocamora, 2002) and identity (Craik, 1994; Taylor, 2012) in a landscape where both male and female artists are expected to project success while remaining true to their cultural roots (Rose, 2008; Entwistle, 2009). Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural intermediaries and Entwistle's

(2009) analysis of fashion labour, stylists function as translators (Arvidsson, 2011; Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006) between global luxury brands and the world of UK rap, with the artist's identity at the core of their mediation. In this role, they help navigate the tension between the aspirational codes of luxury fashion (McNeill and Venter, 2019) and the grounded authenticity that UK rap demands (Speers, 2017; Fraley, 2009; Banet-Weiser, 2012), which can be conflicting. Vernon, a London-based stylist of Jamaican-British heritage, who has worked with Skepta, Lancey Foux, and other UK rap artists, articulates this complexity clearly: "My role is not just about picking clothes; it's more about curating an image that aligns with the artist's identity" (Appendix 3, 00:02:16). Her statement speaks to the broader labour of meaning-making (Couldry, 2003; Littler, 2004) that stylists perform (Lynge-Jorlen, 2020); not only dressing the artist, but also sustaining a coherent public image (Marshall, 2010) that feels culturally rooted and personally credible. In the context of a fashion industry that has historically excluded, appropriated or exoticised Black people and their style, the stylist's role is pivotal. Rather than diluting the artist's identity (Gill, 2007) to fit dominant fashion narratives (Tulloch, 2016; Saha, 2018), stylists like Vernon reinforce it, ensuring that the visual presentation resonates with both brand expectations and the artist's audience, but most importantly, in alignment with who the artist is. This process is especially significant for Black UK rappers, whose public image is often subject to racialised and gendered scrutiny (Tulloch, 2010; Wallace, 2020; Fatsis, 2018). Thus, stylists emerge as cultural workers who mediate between institutional fashion systems and the lived experiences of UK rap artists, contributing to the construction of style as a form of resistance, narrative control and cultural capital.

Many stylists working with UK rap artists are themselves embedded within the same cultural spaces as the performers they style (McRobbie, 1998; Entwistle, 2009; Lynge-Jorlén, 2022). Their proximity enables a deeper understanding of the nuances of identity construction (Skeggs, 2004), especially for artists navigating race, gender, class and heritage simultaneously. In this context, stylists operate not only as cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1984; Entwistle, 2009) but also as interpreters who portray an artist's identity through clothing. As Kamara, the editor and chief of GUAP magazine, observed:

> Stylists are the ones that kind of like build, not personas, but like an identity or can help like push an identity for an artist. … So, I think they're very important because … the stylist is the one that's gonna be able to like pull together things to actually like push forward that identity" (See Appendix 3.1, 00:07:35).

Kamara's insights reflect the broader importance of stylists as collaborators in an artist's public image (Lynge-Jorlén, 2022), where styling becomes not only a visual practice but an affective one; grounded in trust (Couldry, 2003), intimacy (Entwistle, 2009) and shared cultural codes (Lynge-Jorlén, 2022). These dynamics are especially significant in UK rap, where authenticity is not just a personal value but a strategic imperative for audience engagement (Speers, 2017) and brand distinction (Banet-Weiser, 2012). I propose that, beyond the cultural intermediary (Bourdieu, 1984), the stylist is an interpreter who augments the rapper's image by amplifying their individuality through fashion. One must, however, question whether the use of luxury brands amplifies that individuality or muffles it, depending on the level of autonomy the artist can exercise in such contexts (Fraley, 2009; Speers, 2017). The stylist's interpretive role is highlighted by Vernon: "… It's not just about creating stylish looks, but like someone's actual individuality" (Appendix 3, 00:37:26). In doing so, stylists can demonstrate a dual role in the music industry (Negus, 1992), mediating between cultural and commercial agendas (Negus, 2002, p. 503), sourcing pieces that align with the artist's identity and resonate with audiences (Romero, 2012, p. 89). While market imperatives are ever-present, Vernon clearly prioritises creative integrity: "My goal … definitely is more creative driven" (Appendix 3, 00:37:10). This creative-centred ethos aligns with Kamara's editorial direction at GUAP magazine, which prioritises cultural value and community impact over purely commercial aesthetics (Williams, 2019), challenging assumptions that fashion editorial is inherently tied to capitalist logics (Lynge-Jorlén, 2016). Thus, by prioritising the individuality of rap artists, the stylist functions not only as a cultural intermediary (Bourdieu, 1984; Entwistle, 2009; Lynge-Jorlén, 2016) who reinforces artistic identity through creative mediums of dress, but also as a gatekeeper who protects against neoliberal agendas that may infiltrate through brand-driven (McRobbie, 2015) styling. This dynamic is explored further in Chapter Seven through the case study of Skepta.

Vernon affirms that audience connection is fundamental to her styling process: "It's … a wonderful process to contribute to their visual storytelling, you know, and see how it resonates with their audience" (Appendix 3, 00:03:18). These accounts support the argument that in UK rap, stylists help construct culturally resonant visual narratives rather than simply enabling consumption (Entwistle, 2009; McRobbie, 2016). Their work involves both creative and psychological labour (Lynge-Jorlén, 2020, p. 156), as they are tasked with crafting images that are not only visually captivating but also authentic to the artist's identity (Crewe, 2017). Shaybo affirms this branding imperative, stating: "I feel like Shaybo as a brand; every artist has a brand" (Appendix 1.1, 00:05:18). Thus, the stylist becomes a crucial figure in sustaining that brand; one who negotiates between the luxury fashion

industry, artist identity and audience expectation, while embodying the shared cultural knowledge that makes such translation possible.

Clothing operates as a communicative tool within UK rap, where stylistic choices reflect broader social meanings and cultural alignments (Davies, 1992; Entwistle, 2015). Stylists are central to this semiotic economy (Lynge-Jorlén, 2016). Their ability to decode and apply the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) of fashion enables UK rap artists to articulate complex identities grounded in subcultural belonging, aspirational aesthetics and resistant cultural narratives. As Hebdige (1981) asserts, everyday cultural objects, such as fashion, operate within coded systems that convey deeper meanings. Stylists, therefore, play a vital role in negotiating which brands can effectively communicate the intended messages of artists. Vernon's reflection makes this clear:

> I think definitely Givenchy, Alyx, Bottega, Prada, Burberry, Louis Vuitton, Nike. I think like those are like the ones that you know, like the most in demand you know; I think it's more about the cultural relevance (Appendix 3, 00:27:33).

Notably, Vernon's inclusion of Nike, a sportswear and streetwear brand (Parker, 2022), alongside high-end luxury houses highlights the hybridity of UK rap fashion identity and style narratives (Tulloch, 2010; Parker, 2022). While Nike's deep cultural embeddedness in UK rap marks it as a subcultural staple, the large presence of luxury labels in Vernon's statement reflects their significance within artists' broader visual and brand aesthetics. These brand preferences illuminate the dual imperatives of UK rap fashion identity: authenticity and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005).

While luxury branding often carries authoritarian and exclusionary connotations, enforcing social divisions through conspicuous consumption (Brodin *et al*., 2016), stylists in UK rap can subvert these narratives by strategically blending symbols of high fashion and streetwear (Rocamora, 2002; Crane, 2012; Lynge-Jorlén, 2016). This strategy not only enhances individuality but allows artists to participate in a system that typically excludes them. Stylists can mediate these cultural tensions, acting as intermediaries (Mears, 2020; Entwistle, 2015; Lynge-Jorlén, 2016) who reconcile mainstream luxury codes with the distinct subcultural identities of UK rappers (Lynge-Jorlén, 2016; Entwistle, 2009). Despite UK rap's roots in resistant capital (Yosso, 2005), many artists now deploy luxury fashion to signify upward mobility and success as established earlier in this chapter. However, this embrace is not synonymous with full assimilation. Rather, it is embedded in what Dedman (2011) describes as a

sustained subcultural collectivity, especially among youth from the UK African diaspora, for whom fashion is a means of cultural self-assertion (Tulloch, 2021). The postmodern model of stylistic fluidity, often theorised through the lens of neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996; Dedman, 2011); is therefore insufficient in capturing the grounded, politicised realities of UK rap fashion identity. As Dedman (2011) argues, while 'peripherals' may engage with fashion trends, 'purists' who are deeply embedded in the culture reject mainstream values and remain committed to the core aesthetics of their scene. This distinction is evident in the tension between rappers' sartorial autonomy and the increasing involvement of stylists and brands.

Within this chapter, the stylist's role emerges at the intersection of identity preservation, cultural advocacy, and consumer culture (Kawamura, 2005; Tulloch, 2010). While postmodern theory frames stylists as promoters of transient lifestyle identities (Lynge-Jorlén, 2020), such readings fail to capture the deeper stakes of fashion within UK rap. The fashion choices made by stylists are not arbitrary; they are intentionally curated to reflect the multifaceted identities of artists and to resonate with audience expectations. Chapter Seven expands on this by presenting a case study on Skepta, offering further insight into the stylist's role within the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay.

The brands that appear on artists' bodies are not just commodities; they are loaded with semiotic value (Barthes, 1983; Hebdige, 1979), influencing how audiences read and engage with the artist's message (Hall, 1997; McLeod, 1999). Stylists, then, are not merely dressing rappers; they are co-producing the visual and cultural language through which UK rap asserts its place within (and against) dominant fashion imaginaries (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006; Rocamora, 2009). This dynamic raises critical questions about how product placement operates within UK rap. Luxury brands often seek alignment with mainstream or palatable figures (Duffy, 2017; Lewis, 2010), which can exclude artists whose identities or aesthetics challenge dominant norms (hooks, 1992; Tulloch and Aspden, 2020). Stylists, in this context, act as both advocates and strategists, selecting and sourcing garments that support an artist's brand and identity while also adhering to the symbolic demands of fashion marketing (Mears, 2020; McRobbie, 1998).

5.7 “You can say thanks to people like Virgil Abloh, rest in peace, for doing things like that”

The convergence of music and fashion industries is often framed through strategic collaborations, but in certain instances, these partnerships are grounded in long-standing personal relationships that predate commercial affiliations. For example, in the UK context, many artists and designers move within the same socio-cultural milieus: urban hubs where music, fashion and street culture intersect organically (Fraser, 2020; Tulloch, 2016). Relationships between rappers and designers frequently stem from shared community ties, mutual admiration, or aligned subcultural aesthetics rather than formal business arrangements (Ikoniadou, 2018). When a musician claims a friendship with a designer, as opposed to a business connection, it may reflect years of informal collaboration, growing up in parallel creative scenes, or bonding over shared experiences of marginalisation within predominantly white fashion institutions (Mercer, 1994; Yosso, 2005; Tulloch and Aspden, 2020). These interpersonal dynamics often shape the affective labour that precedes and underpins official partnerships, revealing an alternative mode of creative alliance rooted in trust, kinship and cultural familiarity (Hardt, 1999; Gregg, 2009).

Moreover, to call such a relationship a “real friendship” implies a subversion of traditional capitalist exchange, where authenticity supersedes commodification (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Within hip hop and Black creative cultures, friendship often blurs into collaboration as a form of communal uplift and resistance to extractive, corporate models (Love, 2019; Banks, 2010). These friendships may involve informal styling advice, co-creation of visuals, or public endorsements (Mears, 2020) that carry cultural rather than financial currency (Lash and Lury, 2007; Cervenan and Olma, 2017). Such friendships also mirror the logics of “community cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2005), wherein cultural insiders rely on social, navigational and linguistic capital to build platforms for one another. Recognising these bonds as more than transactional reveals how the boundaries between music and fashion are not merely crossed but interwoven through shared lifeworlds and mutual cultural labour and sharing of resources.

Although I choose to primarily draw on Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model regarding social capital throughout this thesis, Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of social capital is evident within the UK rap artists and fashion designers’ personal relationships. But even more so, Bourdieu’s (1987) concept of symbolic capital is amplified. Symbolic capital emphasises the importance of social activity's "symbolic" aspects (Swartz, 1997). The late Virgil Abloh was a friend and ally to UK rap artists and played a pivotal role in the involvement of UK rappers within the realm of luxury fashion, signifying the power of social capital (Yosso, 2005). “You can say thanks to people like Virgil Abloh, rest in peace,

for doing things like that" (See Appendix 1, 00:02:58). Ladoja's following statement highlights how a social connection allowed for UK rappers to be included in the luxury fashion scene:

> He was the creative director and founder of Off-White … he was inviting all the artists, all the rappers … to his show … Virgil really took that power in 2015 (See Appendix 2, 00:07:02 and Appendix 2, 00:11:24).

Yosso's (2005) concept of social capital as a lens for my work underlines how UK rappers use networks of people and community resources for their immersion within the luxury fashion sphere. The presence of Black cultural figures within the luxury sector, such as Abloh creates a more profound sense of belonging for UK rappers. Marginalised ethnic groups have leveraged their social connections and influence to access opportunities (Yosso, 2005), which UK rappers have done in the luxury space. Consequently, these communities give back the information and resources they have gained through institutions, to their social network; a UK rapper can then use their personal relationship with a designer to connect another rapper with an opportunity. Virgil Abloh is an example of how a designer can implement community cultural wealth mediums to uplift black rappers institutionally and visibly within elite scenes (Campbell, 2021). Historically, enslaved African Americans established and sustained social networks (Gutman, 1976; Sanchez, 1993; Stevenson, 1996), illustrating a "lifting as we climb" medium (Gurnier *et al*., 1997, pp. 167) to navigate society. Aside from social capital, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) is apparent in the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interconnection. "A lot of rappers will start going to these places just through PR introductions … But us, we've always gone through relationships. Always" (See Appendix 1, 00:19:42). Lash's account denotes that navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) is achievable through social capital. Black UK rap artists cultivate personal relationships with luxury brand designers to effectively navigate the luxury fashion industry, which, as established earlier, was not initially designed for Black, working-class people and their success.

The interaction between designers and rappers within the UK rap and luxury brand interplay alters the way in which rappers and brands come together. Rappers having an ally within the luxury sector can dismantle the way brands use Black culture (Miller, 2011) and promote fair exchanges. "Matthew Williams being at Givenchy … Maximilian being at Ferragamo. … it can completely shift the brand. It can completely shift the way that luxury and rap interact" (See Appendix 2, 00:13:43). Ladoja's statement introduces considerations of the effects that social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005) pertaining to UK rap artists and fashion designers has on the decolonisation of a brand's identity. "We

went to Burberry not because we've never been to Burberry; we started going there when Daniel Lee entered" (See Appendix 1, 00:19:42). This quote by Lash underscores that it takes a designer who is an ally of the UK rap community and an advocate of diversity, equality, equity and inclusion to truly decolonise a brand's identity. Burberry is a highly esteemed British luxury brand (Zhu, 2023) that historically featured primarily White faces in brand campaigns, and is known for being British (Weston, 2016). The relationships Burberry's creative director, Daniel Lee, has with Black UK rappers such as Skepta and Kano, who have featured in the 2023 Burberry brand campaigns (Cartner-Morley, 2023), have illustrated what being British is today: multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and diverse (Uberoi and Modood, 2012; Ashcroft and Bevir, 2017). Multiculturalism and decolonisation are closely linked (Abu-Laban *et al*., p.16, 2022). I argue that the social capital (Yosso, 2005) that is seen between UK rappers and Daniel Lee, resulting in brand and fashion imagery of Black faces, is a form of decolonisation concerning Burberry's traditional brand identity; changing the way Britishness is perceived.

Personal connections are crucial in determining that authenticity can be present in brand partnerships. "It's really important to … consider those partnerships; make them meaningful through authenticity" (See Appendix 2, 00:21:40). Ladoja's statement indicates that authenticity can be present in business-related affiliations. I argue that personal connections negate indications of inauthenticity in brand collaborations (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Despite these friendships producing business-related opportunities (Halbal, 2018), they can still be genuine. Even friendships formed in the workplace foster authentic and sincere connections between individuals (Zigomo *et al*., 2024). The motive behind the relationship is genuine; Abloh's motive was centred more around inclusion and elevating Black representation than it was around making money or exploiting rappers, which Lash concurs:

> So, the relationship again … I'll talk about us; when I say us, my world, me, Skep … we were … always pulling up and being there, and they were always referencing us in secret. … We were always on their mood boards. The difference is with Virgil … he made it obvious; he didn't hide it. He brought me to open the show. He brought us to the show, he brought Headie One. (See Appendix 1, 00:09:05)

Lash highlights two critical points. First, luxury brands have a history of referencing UK rappers and culture, implying racial plagiarism (Pham, p. 67, 2017); these unacknowledged references highlight issues of appropriation (Childs and Jones, 2020; Heymann, 2023), lack of credit and exploitation

(Pham, p. 67, 2017). Second, authentic personal relationships are safety nets against such exploitative tactics (Miller, 2011) for rappers. Abloh credited UK rappers and overtly highlighted their cultural value in the luxury fashion sector. Abloh's impact resulted in rappers showing loyalty to his work by wearing his designs: "If you ask me, "… do you wear LV", I'll say I wear Virgil's collection LV" (See Appendix 1, 00:19:42); this declaration is rooted in an authentic relationship, not a business-oriented motive, alluding that authenticity can still exist even when there are intentions for exposure within an association. Lash provides an example that STEELO visually captured featuring UK rapper Lancey Foux and ex-creative director of Givenchy, Matthew Williams:

> We know these people personally enough to think, alright, we're gonna go and … make this happen. … that's how these things … happen, like Matthew … knew us, got to see Lancey, then thought Lancey would be perfect. There's no product that drew us there. (See Appendix 1, 00:16:56 - 00:19:38)

I argue that authenticity inhabits within social capital (Yosso, 2005). No product drew Lancey Foux or STEELO to Givenchy; their relationship with Williams did, which was rooted in a real friendship. UK rap artists are more inclined to work with people they have personal relationships with and allies within their community, introducing organic exchanges. Because the affiliation between the UK rapper and designer is genuine, it pushes the rapper to associate with the brand: "We don't fuck with random brands. It's because we know the person. There's something drawing us there, and it makes sense" (See Appendix 1, 00:20:23). UK rap artists and cultural figures will not associate with brands for the sake of it; their connections to brands are rooted in authentic relationships that align with who they are. By virtue of friendships, UK rap's interplay with luxury fashion brands reflects the predominant theme in UK rap music: realness. The overarching themes in this chapter thus far illustrate the inimitability of UK rap's relationship with luxury fashion brands. Thus, the next section discusses the nuances in differences to its US counterpart.

To finish, these dynamics reveal that the convergence of UK rap and luxury fashion is not merely the outcome of market strategy, but rather a deeply relational process anchored in trust, affective kinship and cultural 'intimacy'. Personal relationships operate as conduits for creative legitimacy and inclusion, especially in an industry historically exclusionary to Black working-class individuals (Collins, 2006; Tynes, 2017). Rather than serving as superficial networking tools, such connections embody alternative modes of cultural labour that complicate binary distinctions between the personal and the professional (hooks, 1994; Banks, 2010). They offer an infrastructure of belonging and solidarity that

transcends corporate imperatives, aligning with Pan-Africanist traditions of collectivism and mutual uplift (Nzegwu, 2006; Adomako Ampofo, 2016). In this context, authenticity is not incidental but foundational; articulated through community-rooted affiliations that defy extractive capitalist logics (Banet-Weiser, 2012). The relationship between UK rappers and designers thus becomes a terrain for reimagining the structures of fashion and music industries themselves, pushing toward more equitable and culturally accountable practices. These entanglements not only disrupt conventional notions of artistic autonomy and market relations (Hesmondhalgh, 2013) but also foreground the ways in which cultural capital is generated within Black diasporic networks (Hall, 1997; Yosso, 2005; Miller, 2011).

5.8 “The UK culture don't really like people flexing on them”

As an avid listener of UK and US rap, I suggest that the two genres relate differently to luxury fashion brands because Black Britain and Black America exhibit cultural distinctions (Codrington, 2006). I asked Shaybo whether there is a difference between UK and US rap’s interplay with luxury fashion brands: “There’s a massive difference” (See Appendix 1.1, 00:13:57) she affirmed. Earlier, I argued that UK rappers do not wear luxury brands purely for status but for social mobility. The challenges Black individuals face in achieving upward social mobility are similar in Britain and America (Loury *et al*., 2005; Laurison *et al*., 2020; Gilbert *et al*., 2022; Paige, 2022; Macmillan and Mcknight, 2022), both rooted in racial inequality, but still not identical (Loury *et al*., 2005). The social class systems in the US and UK vary, particularly in their respective definitions of the working class (Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Savage, 2000). Socio-economic status affects behaviour (Manstead pp. 267-291, 2018), which I argue can affect how Black British and American rappers interact with luxury brands. While US rap and hip hop are often associated with “bling” (Chandler and Chandler-Smith, 2005, p.241; Romero, p. 22;92, 2012), UK rap is linked with the tracksuit (Amin, 2019; Parker, 2022). US rappers use luxury brands flamboyantly and ostentatiously (Chandler and Chandler-Smith, p. 241, 2005; Miller, 2011; Podoshen *et al*., 2014). I propose that Black American rappers adopt a showy and grandiose image (Miller, 2011) to emphasise their social advancement and separate themselves from facets of the working/middle-class American society (Miller, 2011). However, US rappers can dress in luxury brands from head to toe and still “keep it real” and go to the “hood” (Romero, p. 22, 2012). On the other hand, I argue that luxury brands still symbolise upward social mobility and class experiences for Black British rappers. However, the distinction lies in UK rap artists ascending the social hierarchy while overtly maintaining a working-class persona through dress to remain relatable, as Shaybo previously discussed regarding tracksuits. She goes on to say:

> The UK culture don't really like people flexing on them … 'Ohh, I've got a chain, I've got this. I've got that' – its unrelatable. … Artists are learning that you know, be relatable because the American culture is different from the UK culture. (See Appendix 1.1, 00:14:31).

Shaybo's account solidifies the disparities between rap culture in the UK and the US concerning luxury products. She underlines how braggadocio dress and demeanour are not received positively by UK rap audiences, illustrating that not only is relatability crucial in UK rap, but its interplay with luxury fashion brands must never override the resonance that is embedded in UK rap fashion identity.

UK rap was first influenced by US rap before it developed its inimitability (Codrington, 2006; Turner, 2017). African American culture constitutes the majority of American popular culture (Elam and Jackson, 2010) and has served as the blueprint for Africa's diaspora (Rotimi *et al*., 2016), successfully permeating and dominating popular culture globally (Morgan and Bennett, 2011), particularly through hip-hop and rap in the contemporary world (Dyson, 2007). Black British youth have been influenced (Clarke and Thomas, 2006, pp.299–315) through television and music, as Lash explains:

> We were always looking; you're not gonna look at home. At your what - your uncle? No way, you're gonna look at the TV. And who was on TV? Americans … they've always kind of just been able to be them. Put it on, 'we're cool' and kind of push it" (See Appendix 1, 00:12:16).

Particularly for youth culture, US Hip-hop has effectively portrayed social, political, and economic realities in a medium that resonates with Black youth globally (Alridge and Stewart, 2005). Popular culture also has a track record of influencing Black males, yet Black masculinity in America has informed constructs of coolness in popular culture (Kirkland and Jackson, 2009), which Black British youth have engaged with (Codrington, 2006), according to Lash. However, today, UK rap has established itself as an autonomous subculture through its inimitable fashion identity, impacting its interrelationship with luxury brands, exemplifying a disinclination to follow hip-hop's materialism (Podoshen *et al*., 2014) and American popular culture, particularly in regards to dress and style narratives (Tulloch, 2010). Black British youth can now look to their own culture instead of the globalised African American culture. This confronts the prevailing notion that Black representation and "social pathologies are predominantly African American", particularly in the context of rap music

(Bramwell, 2011, p. 15) and luxury fashion. Lash states: "We are now … steering away from … copying Americans. … they were the only … people we were looking at until we knew what we, in my opinion, should be looking at" (See Appendix 1, 00:12:16). The effect of what was once a significant catalyst in shaping UK rap was the emulation of US rap culture, which Lash continues to expand on in the context of dress:

> Whether it's more or less now, we kind of follow America … we've always kind of looked to them and tried to follow them … when we were younger, you'd see us wearing baggy clothes … new era caps (See Appendix 1, 00:11:16).

The imitation of baggy clothing that Lash discusses is associated with US rap and hip-hop (Romero, 2012), and exemplifies what I define as cross-regional diasporic resonance: when an African diasporan community in one region identifies with Black lived experiences that have manifested through clothing or musical forms generated by an Afro-diasporic community in another region. In terms of dress, cross-regional diasporic resonance is rooted in politics, cultural expression and exchange, as well as socioeconomic challenges that have shaped the style and dress of the African diaspora in Britain and America, intending to forge a distinctive identity (Tulloch, 2004). Cross-regional diasporic resonance is also seen through music. Black British and American people have used music as an outlet of expression for Black culture, racial subversion, identity, political matters, socioeconomic discrimination and gender-related issues (Gilroy, 1987; Rose, 1994; Ibrahim, 1999; Bennett, 2000; Bramwell, 2011; Henry, 2012; Barron, 2013; Bonnette 2015; Wallace and Johnson, 2018; Baptist, 2022). Therefore, although Black British youth may have drawn on Black American culture, music or dress, rather than determining this as one-dimensional emulation, it is a manifestation of cross-regional diasporic resonance, echoing ideologies of Pan-Africanism.

To conclude, the interviews illustrate how UK rap's relationship with luxury fashion is shaped by distinct cultural, classed and diasporic dynamics. While African American rap has historically provided a blueprint for aspirational style (Miller, 2011) and performance (Banet-Weiser, 2012), UK rap artists have adapted these influences to reflect the sensibilities of Black British working-class identity; favouring relatability over spectacle, and grounding image in cultural authenticity (Love, 2019) rather than excess. This evolution marks a growing confidence in UK rap's own stylistic codes and socio-cultural voice. It reflects not only a divergence from American norms (Laurison *et al*., 2020) but also a

broader diasporic negotiation of identity, taste and resistance through fashion and music (Codrington, 2006; Tulloch, 2010; Laurison *et al*., 2020).

Conclusion

Chapter Five marked the beginning of uncovering the essence and intricacies of the intersection between UK rap and the luxury fashion industry. It traced the genre's early assimilation into the luxury fashion sector, foregrounding the power of social capital and networks in facilitating access to exclusive spaces. The cultural significance of the tracksuit was examined as a symbol of subcultural identity and relatability, underscoring how UK rap remains tethered to community and classed experiences even as it enters luxury spaces. The chapter also engaged with gendered dynamics in UK rap's relationship with luxury fashion brands, drawing on insights from Shaybo. Her contributions revealed how the male-dominated nature of the industry continues to shape women's access to luxury brand related visibility. Shaybo's narrative provided a vital counterpoint to the masculinised landscape of UK rap, while Vernon and Kamara's reflections on the stylist's role emphasised how visual curation through dress is rooted in preservation of the rap artist's identity, even within creative and commercial negotiations. This chapter demonstrates that product placement and brand mentions transcend mere marketing; they function as forms of aspirational capital, cultural positioning and strategic navigation within an unequal industry terrain; as much as they can be forms of product placement, or ways to "get a cheque", as Shaybo stated. Personal relationships between UK rap artists and designers further illuminate the importance of social capital; not simply as access, but as agency within an elite and often exclusionary domain. As highlighted by Shaybo and Lash, the differences between UK and US rap's engagements with luxury fashion are complex and distinct; not indicative of mimicry, but instead reflective of a cross-regional diasporic connection rooted in parallel, yet context-specific, expressions of Black cultural identity. These insights reinforce the value of semi-structured interviews in revealing how UK rap artists have negotiated the entangled dynamics of class, race, luxury fashion and visibility, offering dimensions of meaning that cannot be accessed through lyrical analysis alone. Together, these findings lay the groundwork for the next chapter's in-depth lyrical analysis, where brand references, hustler identities, and Afro-diasporic pride further expand the critical lens on UK rap's evolving relationship with luxury fashion brands, illustrating how it operates as a form of cultural currency from which the luxury sector continues to benefit.

Chapter Six: Lyrics, Luxury and Currency

6.1 Introduction

Lyrics are the most authentic portal to understanding the intersection of UK rap and luxury fashion brands; a key part of this intersection is acknowledging the Afro-diasporic potency from which luxury brands (in)advertently benefit. This chapter seeks to address the first research aim: To examine the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, and to highlight how UK rap functions as a Black British cultural currency from which the luxury fashion sector derives benefit. The variances and intricacies of UK rap can only be fully grasped by speaking to industry professionals, as illustrated in the previous chapter, and through content analysis of UK rap songs: Unfiltered and creative discourse in the form of Afro-diasporic linguistic capital, which is the focus of this chapter. While this thesis does not claim that UK rap is wholly representative of the broader UK African diaspora, it recognises UK rap as a powerful contemporary cultural expression that reflects the lived experiences, aspirations, and paradoxes of Black British youth culture.

This chapter draws on a content analysis of a final sample of one hundred and twenty-six UK rap songs released between 2014 and 2024. As mentioned in Chapter Four, all lyrics have been accessed through *Apple Music* or *Genius*. The examples of lyrics and songs used in this chapter have been selected to illustrate specific instances that align with the chapter's key themes; for a broader overview, the reader is encouraged to refer to the pie charts provided. While this research does not adopt a quantitative methodological framework, it employs pie charts to illustrate the dominant themes that emerge from the dataset, particularly those most relevant to the research questions, aims and objectives. These visual aids offer the reader a snapshot of how UK rap operates as a form of Afro-diasporic cultural currency and of the complex, layered ways in which luxury brands are referenced across the sample. Thematic structuring based on aspects that position UK rap as an Afro-diasporic cultural currency and distinct factors in the content analysis guide the chapter's arrangement, beginning with a discussion of luxury brand-related lyrics, which contributes to addressing the third research question: are all lyrical mentions of luxury brand names forms of product and brand placement? This section examines both the contexts in which luxury fashion brands are mentioned, involving themes of gender and class experiences, and the frequency of those mentions, highlighting the brands that have most benefited from recurring lyrical visibility. These patterns demonstrate how luxury fashion becomes entangled in the symbolic and cultural sphere of UK rap. The significance of

this cultural entanglement is amplified by the genre's commercial success. As of 2022, rap and hip hop accounted for 12.4% of album consumption and 18.9% of singles consumption in the UK (BPI, 2023), while globally, hip hop-adjacent genres comprised nearly 25% of all Spotify streams (Spotify, 2023). Notably, Central Cee[23] and Dave's 2023 track *Sprinter* broke records as the most-streamed UK rap song of all time, reaching 13.4 million streams in its first week and over 500 million to date (GRM Daily, 2024). These statistics underscore the genre's wide-reaching influence and highlight the strategic cultural and commercial advantages gained by the luxury fashion sector through its recurrent presence in UK rap lyrics.

The second section discusses community cultural wealth as expressed through UK rap lyrics and the contexts in which those forms of capital emerge, further establishing UK rap as a site of cultural wealth. Drawing on examples from songs in the final dataset, this section highlights not only various forms of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), but also the symbolic relevance of the tracksuit, echoing Lash's discussion in Chapter Five. The revisiting of UK rap fashion identity; this time through content analysis, further foregrounds the fashion and style narratives of UK Afro-diasporic youth examined in the previous chapter. Using Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, this section connects theory to lyricism, demonstrating how artistic expressions reflecting navigational, resistant, familial, social and aspirational capital are embedded in linguistic capital via UK rap.

Heritage is a key theme within this thesis. The cultural currency of the African diaspora becomes evident through lyrical analysis, which is explored in the third section of this chapter. Within this discussion, lyrics that reflect the complexities of navigating and asserting heritage are analysed. The fourth section centres on the notion of double (and at times triple) consciousness. Where a rap artist is from can reflect multiple layers of identity, and this multiplicity is central to understanding UK rap's articulation of cultural currency.

Finally, lyrical responses to oppression and colonisation, in raw, unfiltered, oppositional and unapologetic forms, aid in the decolonisation of the Black diasporan mind. The lyrics surveyed and discussed in the fifth section claim ancestral heritage, reject imposed constructs and stereotypes of the White gaze, and assert radical defiance. Such lyrics further position UK rap as an Afro-diasporic

[23] Although Central Cee is not from the UK Afro-diasporic community, he frequently collaborates with artists who are, including several of the rappers discussed in this thesis.

cultural currency of liberation, decolonisation and redefinition; a soundtrack to young Black Britain's self-determination and cultural power.

6.2 Lyrics and luxury: brand mentions and contexts

This section explores the luxury brand mentions in the final sample of songs selected for content analysis. Out of one hundred and twenty-six songs, one hundred and ten songs feature luxury brand names. Within the one hundred and ten songs, fifty-two brands are individually referenced, either through their formal name (e.g., "Gucci") or through culturally embedded nicknames (e.g., "double C's" for Chanel). This frequency highlights the pervasiveness of luxury fashion signifiers within contemporary UK rap and underscores their significance as more than superficial markers of style, because these references operate as symbolic assertions of value, belonging and mobility within a racialised cultural economy (Hall, 1992; Gilroy, 1993; hooks, 1994). However, the final sample also raises important considerations about product placement in rap music, highlighting how both commercial endorsements and unsponsored luxury brand mentions can contribute to the cultural and commercial significance of UK rap.

Within a context where Black British identities are marginalised or stereotyped (Back, 1996; Hall, 1997; Fastis, 2018; Parker, 2022), luxury fashion is mobilised in UK rap as a symbolic resource that asserts status, taste and autonomy (Fraser and al Sayyad, 2002; Tulloch, 2010). These references do not merely signal consumer desire but operate as tools of cultural self-definition and social resistance. Drawing on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, such lyrical deployments of luxury brands reflect aspirational capital, where artists articulate visions of success and upward mobility within a society that denies them access to traditional avenues of prestige (Andrews and Figueroa, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Simultaneously, they demonstrate navigational capital, as artists move through and manipulate the codes of elite fashion spaces typically dominated by whiteness (Yosso, 2005; Tinson *et al.*, 2021). In this sense, luxury becomes a vehicle through which Black British rappers negotiate belonging and visibility. Banet-Weiser's (2012) analysis of branding and authenticity further illuminates how these artists use luxury brands to construct credible identities and assert cultural legitimacy in an image-saturated, racially stratified public sphere. Rather than being passive consumers, UK rappers are active curators of symbolic capital, using brand names as semiotic[24]

[24] While this study does not centrally focus on semiotics, it is valid to briefly acknowledge the semiotic dimension of brand references in UK rap. These names function symbolically—through connotation and social codes—as markers of prestige,

resources to disrupt dominant narratives about race, taste and value (Bourdieu, 1984; Hebdige, 1979; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Tinson *et al*., 2021).

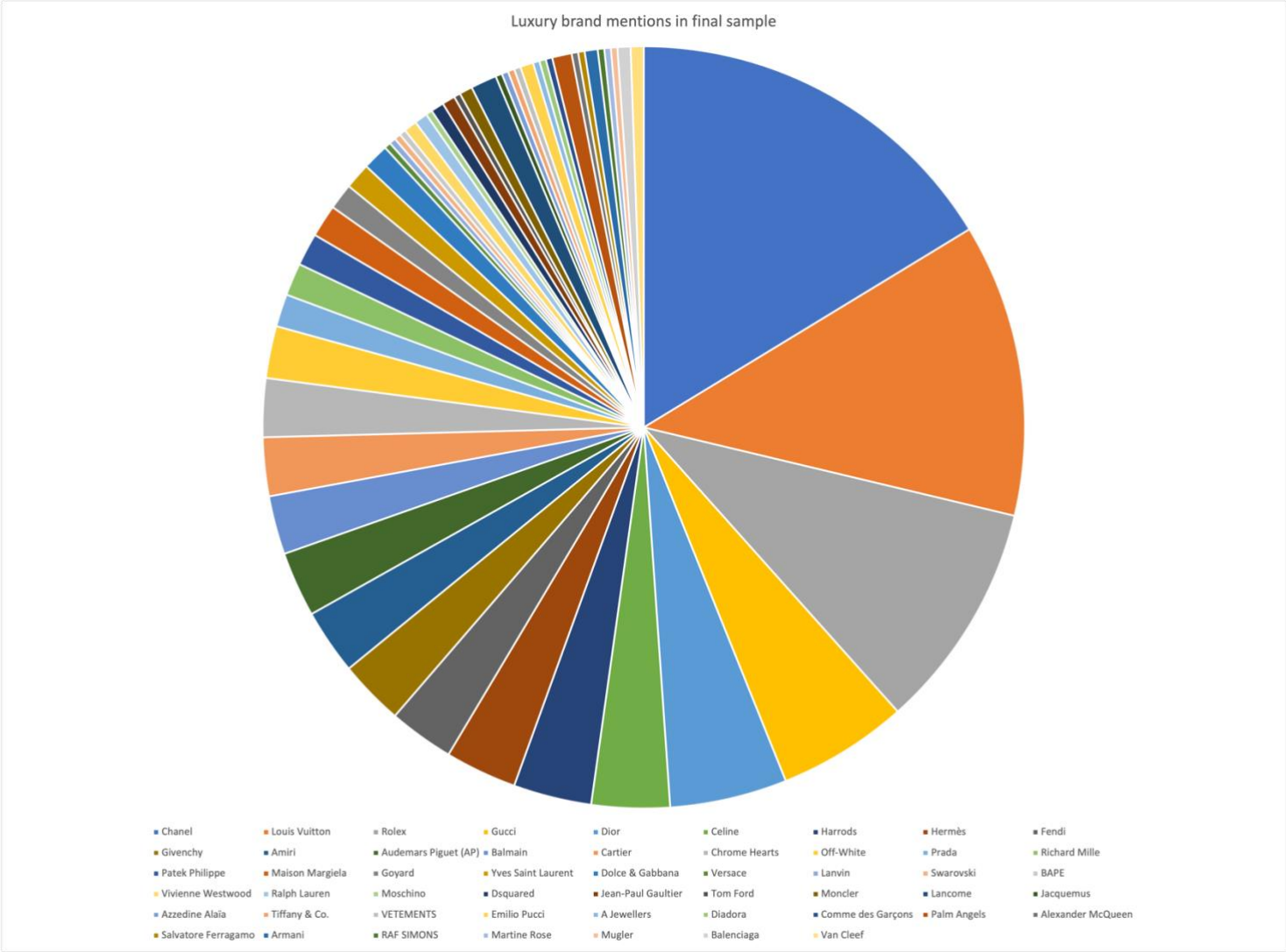

Figure 7: Pie chart of luxury brands mentioned in the final sample of UK rap songs

The previous pie chart visually represents the frequency distribution of fifty-two luxury fashion brands referenced across a final sample of one hundred and twenty-six UK rap songs. It reveals a clear stratification in brand visibility (Sánchez-Olmos *et al*., 2023), with certain names dominating the UK

resistance, and re-signification (Barthes, 1972; Hall, 1997; Williamson, 1978; Hebdige, 1979). They operate as part of a cultural grammar through which Black British artists challenge exclusionary hierarchies of taste and value.

rap lyrical landscape. Chanel stands out as the most frequently mentioned brand, appearing fifty-nine times, followed by Louis Vuitton, at fourty-five mentions. Other prominent entries include Rolex, Gucci, Dior and Celine, each occupying substantial segments of the chart. This concentration of brand mentions indicates the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998) certain luxury houses hold within UK rap discourse. Importantly, these names are not merely cited in their original forms; brand references often appear in coded language or nicknames (Zhang *et al*., 2024) such as "LV" for Louis Vuitton or "CC" for Chanel, embedded within Afro-diasporic vernacular (Gates, 1988). This linguistic adaptation reflects how UK rap artists incorporate luxury labels as part of a broader cultural lexicon, thus recontextualising these global brands within Black British cultural frameworks and expressions of status, resilience, and aspiration (Kasmi *et al*., 2021; Sánchez-Olmos *et al*., 2023). The sonic currency of UK rap thereby functions as an informal marketing conduit (*Vogue Business*, 2020; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023), amplifying brand presence to a dedicated and often youth-driven audience (ibid.). Thus, although we cannot definitively determine whether each mention constitutes product or brand placement without having evidence of brand deals, this graph illustrates the potent sonic platform UK rap provides for the diffusion of luxury brand names. It also signals how luxury brands benefit from UK rap as a form of cultural currency, particularly as this thesis aims to highlight how UK rap is a Black British cultural currency from which the luxury fashion sector benefits. However, given that this study is sociological and cultural in nature, rather than market-oriented, this thesis is less concerned with quantifying direct marketing impact and more focused on how brand mentions function within artistic Afro-diasporic expression and currency. While the data shows prolific referencing of luxury brands, the motivations behind these mentions remain varied and context-dependent. As Shaybo stated in Chapter Five, some artists name-drop brands due to partnerships, while others do so 'just because'; suggesting that such inclusions may serve rhetorical, aesthetic or narrative functions. As the researcher, I do not interpret all luxury brand mentions as instances of product or brand placement, particularly when these mentions are deeply interwoven with artists' lived experiences and narrative expressions. This section explores these lyrical usages in greater depth.

UK rapper Headie One's track *Chanel* (2019), featuring Lotto Ash, provides a compelling example of how luxury brand references operate as symbolic assets in contemporary UK rap. The song features a dense concentration of brand name citations: Chanel is mentioned seven times, including one reference to the brand's iconic nickname, "double C's"[25]; luxury brand nicknames such as "Rollie"

[25] While this study does not conduct a formal semiotic analysis, the use of brand nicknames such as "double C's" is worth noting. These linguistic stylisations serve as culturally coded references that contribute to a shared

(Rolex) and "AP" (Audemars Piguet) (Lin and Chen, 2020) reveal further layers of relational capital. As Lin and Chen (2020) argue, brand monikers humanise aspirational objects and integrate them within everyday vernacular. These informal designations are not trivial; they reflect linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005), sociocultural intimacy, and cultural ownership. Naming becomes an act of socialisation—embedding the luxury object in community, identity and sound (Alim, 2006). Continuing with the brand mentions in *Chanel*, Dior appears six times; Givenchy, five times; Gucci, six times; with single mentions of BAPE, Moncler, Louis Vuitton, and Dolce & Gabbana. This saturation of luxury fashion brands is not merely ornamental; it reflects a sophisticated engagement with the politics of visibility, value and recognition within global consumer culture (Entwistle, 2009; Rocamora, 2015). In *Chanel*, luxury is entangled with the lived realities of economic precarity and survival, challenging the assumption that wealth must stem from institutional legitimacy or professional labour (Fraser, 1997; Miller, 2011). Headie One's declaration, "Life was hard and bummy so I just trapped[26] until I made it lovely," collapses the distance between hardship and aesthetic expression (Gilroy, 2002), suggesting that access to luxury is earned through tactical resilience rather than conformity. This outlook reframes designer fashion not as a symbol of capitalist success, but as the material outcome of hustling and self-determined mobility (hooks, 1992; Miller, 2011). By invoking luxury fashion brands, Headie One performs aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) publicly, embedding elite symbols into the sonic environment of UK rap, and thus, re-contextualising them within working-class, diasporic narratives. The example of *Chanel* is not simply a reflection of material aspiration but an active reconfiguration of who can 'own' luxury, linguistically, culturally and symbolically. In this sense, such lyrical naming functions as a mode of claiming space within fashion's historically exclusive sphere (Tulloch, 2010; Craik, 2009), aligning with navigational capital in Yosso's framework: the ability to move through spaces not originally designed for racially marginalised communities. Ultimately, lyrical references to fashion brands are not just a matter of taste or trend; they constitute a semiotic strategy through which artists like Headie One navigate postcolonial consumer economies (Appadurai, 1996; Mbembe, 2017), assert symbolic value (Bourdieu, 1984), and expand the cultural terms of legitimacy.

The intersection of authenticity and luxury fashion in UK rap lyrics further complicates the commodification of Black cultural identity. While brand references may appear at first glance as signs

symbolic repertoire within UK rap. Their inclusion here reflects the sociolinguistic and cultural relevance of brand nicknaming rather than a systematic exploration of signification.

[26] The term "trapped" in UK rap refers to engaging in street-level hustling or drug-related economic activity. While this study does not conduct a criminological analysis, such language serves as a vital narrative and sociolinguistic device within Black British street cultures (Hallsworth and Young, 2008; Pitts, 2008; Ilan, 2015).

of assimilation into dominant consumer cultures, they often function as strategic performances of what Banet-Weiser (2012) terms authentic branding; a mode of identity articulation that signals credibility and cultural rootedness, even within commodified frameworks. For Black British artists, invoking authenticity is not a simple affirmation of 'realness' but a complex navigation through the contradictory pressures of marketability, cultural loyalty and racial visibility (hooks, 1992; Gilroy, 2000). As Lahusen (2020) argues, authenticity is often demanded of racialised artists by an audience and industry that simultaneously exploits and exoticises their difference. In this context, luxury becomes a paradoxical tool; both a signifier of aspirational success and a performative index of authenticity, especially when embedded in narratives of struggle and self-made ascent (Baszile, 2008; McMillan Cottom, 2022). This dual function unsettles fixed binaries between resistance and complicity, allowing rappers to assert a culturally legible self that is both aspirational and 'authentic', a process Hearn (2008) describes as the labour of self-branding within neoliberal economies. The invocation of brands like Chanel or Dior does not automatically equate to cultural dilution (Rose, 2008); instead, when contextualised within lyrics that foreground marginalisation, survival and diasporic pride, these references operate as signs of authentic experience and cultural fluency rather than mere commercial endorsement (Cutler, 2017; Tinson *et al*., 2021). In this way, authenticity becomes not a rejection of luxury, but a strategic negotiation of it.

In Unknown T's *Often* (2021), lyrics like "I want Chrome Hearts, Corteiz, Celine, all Yves Saint drip, but I already copped them" and "We pop champagne in the club 'cause the lifestyle used to be horrid" reflect a braggadocious yet purposeful engagement with fashion as a marker of survival, success and (re)claimed status (Baszile, 2008; Yousaf, 2020). In *Often* (2021), luxury is not a distant aspiration but a conquered terrain, reinscribed within an authentic narrative of hardship, triumph and visibility. In *Clash* (Dave & Stormzy, 2021), brand fluency operates as a marker of credibility, upward mobility and cultural advancement. This is evident in the lyrics: "Jordan 4s or Jordan 1s, Rolexes, got more than one," which use the language of consumption to assert presence within aspirational economies (Ilan, 2020; Murray, 2021). Across these tracks, luxury fashion functions not merely as a symbol of wealth but as a coded language through which Black British artists rewrite systems of belonging and worth that have historically excluded them (Yosso, 2005; Baszile, 2008; Tinson *et al*., 2021). These artists embed luxury into sonic space as part of what Bourdieu (1984) calls cultural capital, but with an oppositional inflection; what hooks (1992) frames as cultural resistance. Read through Yosso's (2005) lens, this resistance also constitutes resistant capital; a strategy for navigating, contesting and reimagining exclusionary terrains. In fusing lyrical braggadocio with survival narratives, UK rappers

weaponise brand language as a form of creative and authentic defiance, asserting Black diasporic value beyond elite validation.

Oware (2022) conducts content analysis to explore Black expressive cultures in US rap lyrics, focusing on gender, capitalism and hyper-consumption, but such work remains limited in scope and geography. In contrast, my research develops a novel methodological and conceptual framework for analysing UK rap lyrics, centring the African diasporic experience, particularly among Millennial and Gen Z youth in Britain and the specificities of their identity construction through symbolic references to luxury fashion. Rather than approaching these lyrics through a consumer behaviour lens, this thesis interprets brand mentions as cultural texts that articulate resistance, status, aspiration and belonging within a racialised social order (Yosso, 2005; Baszile, 2008; Tinson *et al*., 2021). These lyrical invocations of luxury brands function as signifiers of Black cultural currency and lend luxury brands street credibility (Miller, 2011). This thesis also argues that such currency operates as a communicative strategy through which artists assert value and legitimacy in spaces that have historically excluded them, echoing scholarship on Black cultural expression as resistance (Hebdige, 1979; hooks, 1992; Baszile, 2008; Yosso, 2005). By applying content analysis to one hundred and twenty-six UK rap songs and systematically coding luxury brand references and the contexts in which they are mentioned, I establish a foundation to interrogate how these mentions function not only as markers of wealth but as articulations of diasporic pride and social mobility. These brand mentions also signal cultural legitimacy; not in the sense of gaining permission to participate in culture, but in affirming Black British artists' authority within cultural spaces that have previously overlooked and demonised Black creative influence (hooks, 1992; Mercer, 1994; Baszile, 2008) as discussed in Chapters Four and Six. Within UK rap, luxury references operate as declarations of presence and influence (Fraley, 2009; Banet-Weiser, 2012), allowing artists to redefine cultural hierarchies on their own terms (Yosso, 2005; Tinson *et al*., 2021). Rather than assimilating into elite consumer norms, they recast these markers as extensions of their own narratives, grounded in creativity, resilience and control over representation (Hebdige, 1979; Cutler, 2017; Nanda, 2019).

By embedding luxury brand references within narratives of racialised struggle, social mobility and self-definition, UK rappers dislodge these symbols from their original associations with whiteness and elite wealth (hooks, 1992; Mercer, 1994; Entwistle, 2000), recontextualising them as expressions of diasporic capital rather than endorsements of capitalist aspiration. The invocation of luxury in UK rap is less about conspicuous consumption (Podoshen *et al*., 2014) and more about symbolic survival; a

strategic mobilisation of symbolic capital[27] (Bourdieu, 1984), reworked through the lens of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Within Yosso's framework, such lyrical practices reflect aspirational, navigational and resistant capital, asserting presence and prestige in spaces that have historically marginalised Black voices (Gilroy, 2002; Eshun, 2003; Arday, 2021). This transformation of commercial symbols into tools of self-definition and collective pride signals a unique form of cultural currency grounded in both critique and creativity, rather than passive complicity with neoliberal value systems (Baszile, 2008; Miller, 2011; Tinson *et al*., 2021). Such creative acts are political (Gilroy, 2010); they express Black life and resistance in a world that often seeks to silence or erase it. In UK rap, luxury is not merely aspirational but a form of cultural memory: it recalls shared experiences of exclusion, survival and aspiration or 'finally making it' within Black British communities (Nayak, 2003; Nanda, 2019; Amoako, 2023). By embedding shared narratives of struggle and cultural memory into their lyrics, UK rappers reject the liberal emphasis on individual merit (Goldberg, 2009) and the neoliberal celebration of market-based success (Harvey, 2005), instead affirming value through creative defiance and a vision of community advancement.

Rather than reinforcing the logics of consumption (James, 2010; McRobbie, 2016), UK rappers use luxury brand references to reconfigure dominant symbols of whiteness, wealth and exclusivity. This is powerfully illustrated in Skepta and Lancey Foux's *Animal Instinct* (2019), where the hook[28] repeats: "You see the white man's face when they see us in the Wraith." The lyric captures the charged visibility of Black presence within elite spaces, signalling how luxury is reappropriated as an emblem of disruption, oppositional behaviour and status. Through repetition, linguistic play and contextual reframing, these artists detach luxury signifiers from their original meanings (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Crane, 2012) and re-root them in narratives of diasporic resilience, upward mobility and symbolic survival. By weaving brand names into stories of socio-economic struggle and aspirational pride, UK rappers transform exclusionary capitalist icons (Bourdieu, 1984; hooks, 1992) into accessible declarations of cultural legitimacy. This process does not celebrate neoliberal ideals of individual accumulation (Harvey, 2005; Scharff, 2016), but instead asserts a communal aesthetic of resistance

[27] While this thesis has critiqued Bourdieu's Eurocentric framing of cultural capital and its limited applicability to marginalised racialised communities, his concept of symbolic capital remains analytically useful here. It helps explain how UK rappers mobilise elite cultural markers—such as luxury fashion brands—not for assimilation, but as strategic tools for accruing value, visibility and legitimacy within dominant social and cultural fields.

[28] A hook is the most memorable and repeated part of a song—often a chorus or refrain—designed to catch the listener's attention and enhance the track's commercial appeal (Ashley and Timmers, 2017).

and reclaims space for Black expressive culture within a system that has long rendered it negligible (Gilroy, 1993). In this sense, luxury fashion becomes a communicative strategy; a way to articulate belonging, value and power within a racialised social order (Hebdige, 1979; Rose, 2008). UK rappers engage with luxury fashion in ways that do not blindly accept or reinforce the unequal systems of power and exclusion that luxury culture usually represents, thereby avoiding the uncritical reproduction of its structural hierarchies (Bhambra, 2007; Cervenak, 2014).

Just as *Animal Instinct* (Skepta & Lancey Foux, 2019) and *Chanel* (Headie One, 2019) reframe constructs of luxury through Black cultural assertion, other UK rap tracks between 2014 and 2024 continue this practice by transforming brand references into symbolic acts of self-definition, advancement and statements of defiance (Hebdige, 1979; Rose, 1994; Tinson *et al*., 2021). Not all references celebrate luxury. Some artists explicitly reject its symbolic value, with eleven songs in the final sample denouncing luxury brands. Although discussed briefly in Chapter Seven, in *That's Not Me* (Skepta, 2014), the lyric "Yeah, I used to wear Gucci, I put it all in the bin, 'cause that's not me" refuses the aspirational coding of Gucci. This aligns with what Hall (1996) terms as new ethnicities: a refusal of essentialised Black identities defined through materiality. Similarly, Stormzy's lyrics "Never had a Tom Ford or a Moncler" (*Big For Your Boots*, 2017) disrupts the assumption of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899; Baudrillard, 1998) being tied to black success within rap, using absence to signal anti-capitalist authenticity. Jme's lyrics, "No Hublot, Rolex or AP" (*Issmad*, 2019), furthers this refusal of neoliberal recognition (Fraser, 1990) by privileging integrity and an oppositional stance over affluence.

The content analysis of UK rap songs released between 2015 and 2024 by popular UK rap artists reveals a distinct and definite connection between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, but not necessarily intentional brand or product placement forms. Among the shortlisted one hundred and twenty-six tracks, ninety-eight songs reference luxury brands, as mentioned. While examining the longlisted two-hundred and sixty-four UK rap songs, a significant observation is that there are fewer references to luxury brands between 2014 and 2017. From a Freirean critical consciousness perspective (1970), this is a transformative form of resistance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The lack of luxury brands mentioned in the lyrics between 2014 and 2017 reflects nonconformist techniques (Solórzano and Bernal, 2001). Certain UK rappers were not upholding luxury brands in their songs, thereby resisting being tools of capitalism (Holt, 2006, p. 300) and opposing a postmodern culture strongly linked to the demands of capitalism (Miller, 2011, p.28). In some cases where luxury brands are mentioned within that timeframe, rappers declare that they do not wear them. Brands are

frequently criticised for being proxies of capitalism and for contriving desires (Holt, 2006, p.300); hence, certain brand and product placements in rap music effectively endorse notions of capitalism. As the reader can see, sometimes, there are brand mentions in UK rap lyrics where contexts suggest that there is no commercial agenda, but rather an amplification of a message. "I never wear Balenciaga" (*I'm Coming*, J Hus, 2015); these lyrics by J Hus are a another prime example of lyrical brand mentions not being forms of product or brand placement, challenging the prevalent conceptions that rap songs with luxury brand mentions must be forms of product placements (Davis, 2011; Craig *et al*., 2017; Clay and Bichard, 2019; Metcalfe *et al*., 2020; Farwell *et al*., 2023). In *Coming* (2015), there is no indication of a brand affiliation or product J Hus is promoting. He declares he does not even wear Balenciaga, which is a declaration of who he is as a rap artist and his aloofness to luxury brands; there is no indication of a strategically executed brand placement.

J Hus's explicit rejection of the brand — "I never wear Balenciaga" — operates as more than a stylistic aside; it is a cultural declaration. In the broader landscape of UK rap, luxury brands often serve as symbols of aspirational success and access to elite cultural capital (Oware, 2011; Fraser, 2020). However, J Hus's lyric functions as a strategic refusal of that narrative. Rather than aligning with the globalised fashion elite, the rejection gestures toward a different aesthetic allegiance — one rooted in UK rap's subcultural fashion identity. UK rap has long cultivated a streetwear ethos grounded in brands like Nike (Parker, 2022) with the tracksuit becoming emblematic of authenticity, resistance, and working-class Black British masculinity, as illustrated in the previous chapter. Thus, J Hus's refusal of Balenciaga may signal a conscious cultural alignment with this streetwear tradition, one that resists luxury's exclusionary practices and affirms a distinctly UK diasporic fashion language.

At the same time, his statement could also be interpreted more simply — perhaps he just doesn't like Balenciaga. Yet even this aversion carries sociocultural weight. In a genre where naming luxury brands is often equated with status and influence, choosing not to participate in this economy challenges assumptions about consumer desire and conformity. This speaks to the agency of Black British artists in shaping their own representational economies, exercising what Yosso (2005) terms navigational capital. Moreover, his rejection of Balenciaga critiques the often-assumed universality of luxury brand desirability (Entwistle, 2000), highlighting instead the role of personal taste, cultural context, and subcultural belonging. As Bourdieu (1984) notes, taste itself is never neutral — it is structured by class, culture, and history. This distancing complicates the notion of brand mentions in rap as merely forms of product placement. Instead, it invites a reading aligned with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction, wherein cultural choices — including refusals — index taste and social position. J Hus's rejection of

Balenciaga may be less about disinterest in fashion per se, and more about affirming a particular cultural authenticity that resists being co-opted by a luxury system not designed for him. In J Hus's hands, the refusal becomes both a cultural stance and an aesthetic choice, challenging simplistic readings of brand mentions as mere forms of product placement (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Moore & Birtwistle, 2004).

Rather than serving as direct product placement, Balenciaga in this context functions as a metonym for status and fashion capital, aligning with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction, wherein cultural products serve to affirm one's position in social space. However, J Hus's lyrical rejection complicates this — indicating a refusal to be reduced to a consumerist archetype or a marketing tool for luxury conglomerates (Banet-Weiser, 2012). The substitution of Balenciaga with another cultural product would not carry the same symbolic weight; as Barthes (1983) notes, the semiotic value of fashion objects lies in their connotations, not just their denotations. Any replacement would need to resonate with the same socio-cultural contradictions — between authenticity and aspiration, visibility and critique. Hence, it is not that any luxury item could do, but that specific references like Balenciaga are curated for their cultural capital, their embeddedness in discourses of Black consumption, and their potential for subversive reinterpretation within UK rap.

Oppositional lyrics enact what hooks (1992) frames as oppositional cultural practice: a refusal to be subsumed by capitalist value systems. These lyrics echo Forman's (2002) interpretation of hip-hop as a spatial-cultural practice of resistance and local meaning-making. As Ewoodzie (2017) notes, such selective consumption reflects critical agency rather than automatic brand worship. Together, these lyrical practices reveal how Black British rappers rework the meanings of luxury to centre lived experience and Afro-diasporic style narratives (Tulloch, 2010) over image, repositioning luxury mentions as a vehicle for self-fashioning and subversion rather than assimilation into dominant consumer hierarchies.

This nuanced relationship, where luxury can be both embraced and disavowed, reflects the broader dynamics of brand cultures (Banet-Weiser, 2012) in which identity and commodification are entangled. Whether artists promote or critique luxury, their lyrical labour contributes to the symbolic economies of these brands, often without reciprocal benefit or equity (Cunningham and Craig, 2016). Black cultural producers such as rappers lend brands coolness (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023), authenticity and reach through the currency of their identity (Banet-Weiser, 2012; McKinley, 2020), yet remain marginalised from decision-making power in those same corporate structures, as discussed in

Chapters Four and Six. In this context, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model offers a powerful framework: UK rappers mobilise linguistic, aspirational and navigational capital to assert presence, critique exclusion, and reimagine Black value outside dominant paradigms. Lyrical rejections of luxury, such as disavowing Rolex or Tom Ford, demonstrate resistant capital, challenging what counts as legitimacy and success. Through their interplay of affirmation and opposition, UK rappers produce a semiotic ecosystem in which luxury brand references are not static endorsements, but dynamic articulations of diasporic consciousness and counter-hegemonic selfhood (Gilroy, 1993; hooks, 1992), grounded in creative defiance against dominant cultural norms. Thus, in addressing the third research question — are all lyrical mentions of luxury brand names forms of product and brand placement? — this thesis contends that brand references in UK rap are not reducible to commercial alignment. Rather, they function as narrative strategies through which Afro-diasporic artists express experience, status, and creative autonomy.

UK rap lyrics that feature luxury brand names are also deeply gendered. UK female rappers use luxury references to claim power on their own terms (Boylorn, 2017), challenging the genre's historically masculine scripts (Forman, 2002; Hess, 2005). In *Get It* (Shaybo, 2024), the lyrics "I'm a real hustler" signal not just financial independence but cultural ownership, aligning with Black feminist articulations of self-definition (Collins, 1990; Durham *et al*., 2013); also seen in Chapter Five, in Shaybo's interview. Luxury here becomes a sign of agency rather than dependence, an embodied expression of Yosso's (2005) aspirational capital. In *Dip* (Stefflon Don & Ms Banks, 2021), the lyrics "Giving sloppy-toppy[29] with my Rollie on" pair sexual autonomy with brand fluency, reclaiming erotic agency through the language of consumption (Marshall, 2011; Hill, 2022). Rather than reinforcing objectification, the lyric subverts it: the reference to the Rollie (Rolex) does not decorate the sexual act but anchors it in dominance and self-possession. The luxury brand acts as a symbol of control, signalling that the woman is not a passive figure but a boss; stylised, wealthy, and in command of her desire. In this way, the brand name steers the lyric away from being a spectacle of male consumption. It instead moves towards a performance of feminine power. These moments exemplify what hooks (1992) terms the oppositional gaze: a method of looking, consuming, and performing that defies dominant gendered and racialised expectations, asserting presence and visibility on the artist's own terms. Female UK rap artists articulate self-worth through ownership, visibility and self-styling as observed in the content

[29] "Sloppy toppy" is a slang term referring to oral sex, often used in hip hop lyrics to connote sexual performance, power, or status. While crude, such expressions form part of the genre's socio-linguistic landscape and often serve as tools of agency or dominance, particularly when reappropriated by women (cf. Morgan, 2002; Adams and Fuller, 2006).

analysis; an interplay that reflects emergent Black British hip-hop feminism, that rewrites access to power through luxury fashion, wordplay, survival and sound.

Masculinity in UK rap often finds articulation through luxury as a symbol of provision, power and redemptive success. In *Bon Appétit* (Unknown T, 2024), the lyrics "All that pain bought my girl Maison Margiela" connect emotional struggle to reward through high fashion, casting the male rapper as a provider whose emotional labour and resilience are materialised in luxury. Similarly, in *Eagle* (D-Block Europe and Noizy, 2024), the lyrics "When you talk to me, remember that I Birkin bag my daughter… Rolex too" position fatherhood as a site of pride and being the breadwinner. The Hermès Birkin bag, a quintessential status symbol, is reframed as a gesture of care and intergenerational wealth (Weems, 1998), resonating with hooks' (1992) critique of reductive portrayals of Black masculinity and her call for more expansive, care-oriented representations. Rather than simply reproducing capitalist ideals of success, these narratives negotiate survival, visibility, and legacy in a landscape shaped by exclusion (Gilroy, 2010). Read through Yosso's (2005) framework, such lyrics perform aspirational and navigational capital simultaneously: signalling upward mobility while navigating spaces historically hostile to Black masculinity (Arday, 2021).

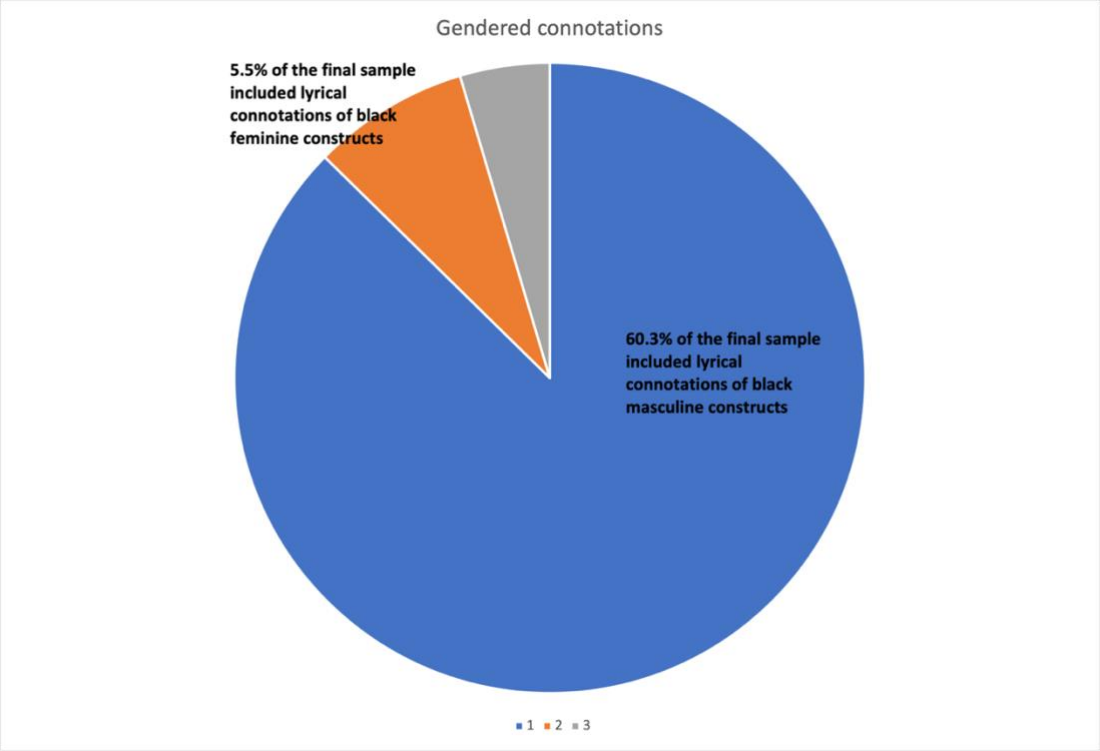

Figure 8: Pie chart representing the black gendered connotations in the final sample

Across both male and female UK rap artists, aspirational capital is frequently articulated through narratives of class mobility and overcoming marginalisation (Yosso, 2005; Bramwell, 2011; Barron, 2013). In Shaybo's "Daily Duppy!" (2020) and Ms Banks' "Daily Duppy!" (2023), themes of struggle, ambition and perseverance are central. However, male rappers more often than not assert their socioeconomic rise through explicit references to luxury fashion: "Held all my tears in when I was broke, now I cry in Amiri" (*Still Outside*, D-Block Europe, 2024). This juxtaposition of past hardship and present luxury reveals how classed and racialised experiences are reframed into aspirational narratives (Avery *et al*., 2016; Crane, 2000). Notably, female artists reference luxury brands less frequently in the dataset, a disparity that supports Shaybo's own reflections on apparent market and industry biases in Chapter Five. Still, when female rappers do engage with luxury references, their lyrical agency disrupts traditional gender binaries and consumer scripts (Millard, 2012; Rose, 1994). This pattern suggests that while aspirational capital is shared across gender lines, the discursive modes through which it is expressed remain uneven, reflecting broader dynamics of power in fashion and music industries (Craik, 2003; Tulloch, 2020).

The data in figure eight reveals a pronounced imbalance in gendered representations within UK rap lyrics, which in most instances feature luxury brand mentions. A dominant 60.3% of the sample is coded with Black masculine constructs, suggesting that the lyrical association between luxury commodities and Black identity is overwhelmingly filtered through masculinised performances of aspiration, power and mobility, aligning with Shaybo's remarks in Chapter Five. Luxury brands such as Rolex, Louis Vuitton and Amiri frequently appear as markers of success and masculine-coded capital; often aligned with resistant and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) and used to affirm status within socioeconomically hostile contexts (Frith and McRobbie, 1990; Cutler, 2017). In stark contrast, only 5.5% of the lyrics evoke Black feminine constructs, despite the centrality of Black female artists and consumers within luxury markets (McMillan Cottom, 2020). The remaining 34.2% of gendered content was ambiguous or ungendered. This data underscores how luxury branding in UK rap is sometimes gendered in ways that privilege masculine narratives of access (Forman, 2002); access that remains far less attainable for female UK rappers (Rose, 1994; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007) as discussed in Chapter Five. The findings call attention to the need for more expansive representations that affirm Black women's agency within both lyrical and luxury fashion economies, particularly as artists like Ms Banks, Shaybo and Little Simz increasingly reconfigure the meaning of wealth, visibility and ownership through decolonial aesthetics and gendered self-determination (hooks, 1992; Durham *et al*., 2013; Baszile, 2015; James, 2020).

The role of the stylist has already been investigated in Chapter Five through the analysis of the interviews conducted with Shaybo and Vernon. However, the stylist in UK rap lyrics is sometimes positioned in tension with ideas of independence and credibility. Four UK rap songs in the final sample have mentioned the stylist, but only one song mentions the stylist as a 'necessary' role. In *Cuban Links* (Skrapz, Nines & D-Block Europe, 2024), the lyrics "three thousand on these leather pants, no stylist, no, no, no stylist" doesn't just reject help; it emphasises self-sufficiency and control over one's image through dress (Entwistle, 2000; Kawamura, 2005; Frisa and Tonchi, 2016). Repeating "no stylist" turns the line into a defensive mantra, suggesting that using a stylist could undermine the rapper's authority over his look. Similarly, in *Nkita* (Knucks and Fimiguererro, 2024) Knucks raps "hit the gala and pull up no stylist," placing himself in elite fashion spaces (Crane, 2000) without needing professional guidance (Craik, 2009; Lynge-Jorlén, 2020); styling becomes a way to prove cultural fluency without relying on institutional or external taste (McLeod, 2021). These oppositional lyrics reflect how some male rappers link personal style with pride, credibility, autonomy and masculinity. But Stormzy disrupts this pattern in *Mel Made Me Do It* (2022), where he not only praises his stylist, Melissa Holdbrook-Akposoe, but puts her name as the track title. In the song, he declares: "we just stepped all clean and said, 'Mel made me do it,'" positioning her not as an accessory to success but as a co-creat
or of his public image (Tayler, 2022). Rather than undermining his credibility, Melissa's presence amplifies it, demonstrating how UK rappers may engage stylists not as signs of dependency but as strategic collaborators (Mears, 2010) in asserting status and visibility within the luxury fashion industry (Han *et al*., 2010; Crane, 2012). This illustrates the stylist's function as a fashion intermediary (Blaszczyk and Wubs, 2018; Lynge-Jorlén, 2020); a cultural broker who facilitates access, aesthetic coherence, and legitimacy across fashion and music spaces (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006; Godart, 2020).

In regard to the 'space' of luxury fashion, mentions of Fashion Week in UK rap lyrics represent more than fleeting references to cultural events; they reflect a strategic assertion of visibility within elite fashion circuits (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006; Godart, 2020). As discussed in Chapter Five, UK rappers position themselves not only as consumers but as cultural contributors to the global luxury scene. Of the one hundred and twenty-six songs analysed, eight reference Fashion Week. For example, "Paris Fashion Week, I'm watching Louis Vuitton" (*Fashion Week*, AJ Tracey, MoStack, Steel Banglez, 2020), is emblematic of how rappers embed themselves in aspirational spaces, reframing what it means to 'belong' within luxury contexts. These lyrics function as performances of navigational and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), whereby artists leverage their social mobility to claim space in

institutions that have historically excluded Black people (Crane, 2000; Entwistle, 2009; Tulloch, 2016). In doing so, they enact a form of cultural reclamation, embedding Black diasporic presence within the rarefied codes of luxury fashion and making it legible to their communities and decolonising the luxury scene.

In conclusion, luxury brand references in UK rap lyrics are not homogenous or commercially fixed. They reflect a complex semiotic terrain in which cultural currency, gender, resistance and aspiration coalesce. Drawing predominantly on Yosso's (2005) framework, this chapter has shown that brand mentions function as both critique and celebration, refusal, affirmation and desire. Luxury brand name drops are embedded in broader diasporic practices of storytelling, identity formation and socio-economic navigation. Whether naming Chanel, Dior, Rolex, or rejecting them altogether, UK rappers use brand language to articulate value on their terms: rewriting belonging and reimagining the cultural script of luxury from the margins.

6.3 UK Rap Lyrics as Sites of Community Cultural Wealth and Cultural Currency

Building on Oware's (2011; 2014) method of content analysis, which centred U.S. hip-hop as a cultural terrain for Black masculine identity formation, this chapter reorients that analytical lens toward the UK rap landscape. However, unlike Oware, whose work focuses primarily on U.S.-centric narratives of masculinity and commercialisation, this study introduces a distinctly black British, diasporic lens rooted in the lived experiences of Black British Afro-diasporic youth negotiating postcolonial Britain. Through a rigorous content analysis of lyrics, this section identifies UK rap lyrical examples that reflect Yosso's (2005) six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant. What emerges is an original contribution to knowledge: UK rap artists not only express these forms of wealth, but do so through highly localised codes, fashion aesthetics, and socio-political critique that remain largely underexplored in current academic literature. Notably, all UK rap songs function first and foremost as forms of linguistic capital: the use of patois, pidgin, vernacular English and multisyllabic lyricism serves as a currency of belonging and resistance (Cutler, 2014; Alim, 2006). This linguistic dexterity is itself a cultural strategy for survival.

In Jme's lyrics: "How could a man with a uni degree, be bussing up mic and chatting this greaze?" (*Man Don't Care*, Jme & Giggs, 2015); we see a tension between institutional and street knowledge, a duality that reflects resistant, navigational and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). By juxtaposing academic success with lyrical authenticity, Jme challenges deficit-based views of Black intelligence and

creativity, showing how marginalised individuals mobilise multiple forms of knowledge to navigate complex social worlds (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Love, 2019). This line exposes the inadequacy of traditional markers of success, instead celebrating culturally grounded intelligences that operate outside elite validation (Morrison, 2010). Jme positions formal education against grassroots credibility, illustrating what Carter (2006) describes as "code-switching between dominant and non-dominant cultural codes." By acknowledging his university degree while simultaneously asserting his authority in the lyrical and street-based domain of grime, Jme navigates two cultural spheres. This dual fluency demonstrates navigational and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005), as he subverts dominant hierarchies by asserting that intellectual and cultural legitimacy can be forged both within and beyond institutional spaces (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Baszile, 2009). Through this juxtaposition, Jme affirms that institutional knowledge does not negate authenticity (Perry, 2004), but can coexist with and even amplify, non-dominant forms of cultural currency valued within UK rap.

The tension Jme presents reinforces the argument that UK rap functions as a pedagogical site where non-traditional knowledge systems are affirmed (Rose, 1994; Baszile, 2008). The lyrics “The music originated and will always remain in the streets” (*Man Don’t Care*, Jme & Giggs, 2015) asserts the epistemological authority of Black British working-class experience, positioning street knowledge as a valid form of cultural wealth. Such claims exemplify resistant capital (Yosso, 2005), as they reject the dominance of white, institutional frameworks in favour of community-rooted epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 2002). UK rap, in this context, becomes a vehicle for asserting Black cultural legitimacy and ownership within systems that have historically ostracised these voices (Back, 1996; Gilroy, 2002; Tinson *et al*., 2021).

Cultural wealth and belonging are also expressed through the symbolic allegiance to the tracksuit within UK rap culture, as evidenced by Lash’s commentary in Chapter Five. In the final data sample, thirty-six lyrics across eight songs reference tracksuits, demonstrating their ubiquity and significance within UK rap discourse. The lyrics from Kenny Allstar and Headie One’s *Tracksuit Love*: “The first tracksuit it was an Umbro, why you think I fell in love with the bando? And then the tracksuit, it turned Ralph Lauren”; demonstrates how navigational capital is both stylistic and spatial. The progression from Umbro to Ralph Lauren[30] marks an aspirational trajectory through UK rap fashion identity and

[30] This stylistic shift has long symbolised transitions in status and aspiration within UK working-class youth cultures. Umbro, associated with football and casualwear, historically represented a hyperlocal, often council estate-based identity. Ralph Lauren, by contrast, aligns with a more globalised, heritage-infused form of luxury that evokes both aspiration and access to elite cultural codes (Osgerby, 2005; Tulloch, 2010).

style narratives (Tulloch, 2010), not only economically but symbolically (Hebdige, 1979), reflecting a shift from marginalised youth identity and street style to aspirational masculinity through dress (Weber and Mitchell, 2004). Drawing from Yosso (2005), this reveals how young Black British men navigate oppressive structures while constructing pathways of legitimacy through style. The tracksuit, long a cultural signifier within UK grime and drill (Williams and Holla, 2021; Adeyemi, 2022), is emblematic of a sartorial language that merges comfort, urban survival, and status (Williams and Holla, 2021; Tulloch, 2010). The tracksuit holds dual meaning: as uniform in the informal economies of the "bando"[31] (a colloquial term for trap house) Gunter, 2017), and as aspirational when branded with high-end names. The mention of Ralph Lauren, a heritage American luxury brand, ties directly to aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), indicating the ability to imagine and access alternative futures despite structural exclusions (Appadurai, 1996). In *Tracksuit Love* (Headie One, 2018), the lyrics "I don't want a shirt that's Burberry, I want tracksuits" explicitly reject an elite fashion brand in favour of working-class style codes (Appleford, 2015), positioning the tracksuit as a site of cultural legitimacy and comfort (ibid.). This reflects resistant capital (Yosso, 2005), as Headie One reclaims value through everyday Black British aesthetics rather than aspirational whiteness.

Bashy's *How Black Men Lose Their Smile* offers one of the most poignant examples of resistant and familial capital, where the rap artist grapples with intergenerational trauma and the colonial miseducation of Black youth. Lyrics such as "Yeah system set up for me to fail… Lies out the coloniser's mouth, teach us we didn't build Egypt, that's how Black men lose their smile" confront the epistemic violence of colonial education systems, echoing the critiques of Fanon (1961) and Diop (1964). These lines illustrate how UK rap becomes a vehicle for challenging dominant historical narratives, enacting both resistant and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). By reclaiming erased histories and exposing systemic miseducation, artists reframe UK rap as a space of decolonial (re)learning and community empowerment. The rejection of Eurocentric knowledge systems represents an embodied resistance to hegemonic ideologies that suppress racial pride and disrupt self-worth (hooks, 1992; Hadley and Yancy, 2012; Bramwell, 2018). Moreover, Bashy's lyrical reflection: "Saw young pictures of my Dad, so handsome, happy and proud, growing up I just saw him frown"; evokes a poignant shift from joy to emotional erosion, shaped by racialised labour systems and social disenfranchisement (Hill, 2022; Bramwell, 2018). This signals familial capital (Yosso, 2005), where kinship memory becomes a source

[31] "Bando" is UK slang derived from "abandoned house" and typically refers to a location used for illicit activity, particularly drug dealing or trapping. Within UK drill and rap contexts, it functions as both a literal and symbolic space of survival and entrepreneurial hustle within the informal economy (Gunter, 2017).

of cultural strength, while also extending Yosso's model into a distinctly British context marked by racial surveillance (Gilroy, 2004), austerity and cultural alienation (McKenzie, 2017).

My content analysis of UK rap songs foregrounds a uniquely Black British manifestation of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, one that intertwines Afro-diasporic aesthetics, class consciousness and racial resistance. While Oware's (2011) analysis offers insight into American hip-hop identities, this thesis centres on the specificity of UK Afro-diasporic cultural production, where rap lyrics operate as a dynamic mode of value-making, tied to histories of migration, austerity and diasporic memory (Back, 1996; Gilroy, 2004; Eshun, 1999). Rather than reproducing US-centric paradigms, this study foregrounds how UK rap articulates cultural currency through distinct vocabularies of aspiration, resistance and heritage (Bramwell, 2011; Osumare, 2007; Quinn, 2020), contributing an original perspective to global hip-hop scholarship. This distinctiveness is not only linguistic but epistemic: UK rap artists code-switch not just between patois and Queen's English, for example, but between deficit narratives and affirmations of cultural resilience. Through the lens of Yosso's (2005) six forms of capital, each made audible in the lyrics examined, this research offers a new framework for understanding how marginalised communities produce, transmit and innovate cultural wealth in a Black British context. Taken together, the UK rap examples in this section demonstrate how it operates as a complex discursive space where personal experience, political critique and cultural aesthetics intersect (Rose, 2008; Preece, 2020). What follows continues to explore how aspirational and resistant capital converge with social, linguistic and navigational strategies, further illustrating the distinct textures of cultural wealth articulated by UK artists across different subgenres and lyrical modes.

Dave's *Verdansk* (2021) offers a lyrical landscape that intricately weaves aspirational affluence with street-based legitimacy, reflecting navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). The line "I took a hundred bags from Barclays bank, no cap, you can go and ask Ellie" performs a deliberate flex of financial acumen within institutional spaces historically closed to Black British youth (Atkinson, 2021; Bourne, 2020). His refusal to flaunt stereotypical designer brands; "I don't rock Gucci or Armani"; enacts a form of symbolic resistance, resonating with earlier examples of oppositional lyrics. In *Warm (Remix)* (2022), Skepta extends this ethos through a potent metaphor of cultural displacement and reclamation: "I know they can't stand me, secretly wish they could still hang me, but now they gotta hang me next to

the Banksy[32].” The lyric highlights a genealogy of racial violence in the context of the contemporary art world, juxtaposing lynching with institutional recognition and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005); as he references his painting that was sold on Sotheby’s (*Sotheby’s*, 2021). By referencing Banksy, a figure associated with subversive yet commodified street art, Skepta foregrounds how Black British artists, once policed and pathologised, now shape the very aesthetic economies that once excluded them. His wordplay resists passive aestheticisation; instead, it positions the Black artist as both subject and curator of cultural value. Within Yosso’s (2005) framework, this signals resistant capital, wherein cultural knowledge is not merely retained but mobilised against dominant hierarchies of taste. UK rap here does more than resist—it reorients the gaze, positioning Afro-diasporic creativity as both critique and currency.

Fredo’s *Like That* (2019) offers a vivid articulation of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). His lyrics convey a hardened, experiential hope, not grounded in fantasy but forged in the everyday negotiation of precarity. In lines like, “I’m living luxury, and last month I was living up in custody,” Fredo collapses temporal and spatial distances between incarceration and success, showing how aspiration emerges from conditions of constraint (Weheliye, 2005). His lyrics go on to say, “You should tell the truth, you ain't built like that,” a line that asserts the authenticity of his experience and the labour behind his survival, challenging performative narratives of success. For many UK rappers, aspiration is inseparable from authenticity, where credibility is earned through lived experience rather than spectacle (Ilan, 2020; Whitt, 2021). Rather than indulging in escapism, Fredo’s vision of mobility is grounded in the street-level economies and knowledge systems (Crane, 2000) that made it possible: “I sat down and learnt how to cook from older G's.” His lyrics in *Like That* reveal aspiration as a form of intergenerational learning (Collins, 1990) and tactical resilience (Love, 2019), where progress is not institutional but communal, improvised and self-directed.

In *Soufside (Simple Demo)* (2022), Lancey Foux mobilises social capital not only through ‘hood’ credibility but also via proximity to fashion networks: “I’m on the phone to Virgil, new Louis Vuitton, I’m on the phone to Matthew, Givenchy”. His lyrics highlight his personal relationships with Virgil

[32] Banksy is an anonymous British street artist known for subversive, politically charged graffiti that has been widely commodified through gallery and auction sales.

Abloh[33] and Matthew Williams[34], aligning with Lash and Ladoja's insights in Chapter Five concerning social capital. Lancey Foux's lyrics demonstrate how relational access, once reserved for institutional gatekeepers, is now part of the cultural currency UK rappers leverage within fashion's upper echelons. Rather than adopting luxury brands purely as status symbols, he positions himself as an insider (Andrews, 2009), shaping those spaces and extending Yosso's (2005) notion of social capital to encompass creative industries. His assertion, "I got the whole hood on a different swag[35]," foregrounds his role as a style conduit between marginalised communities and global fashion economies, grounded in social capital and sharing of knowledge and resources (Fraley, 2009). UK rap here becomes both the medium and the network: a platform through which cultural fluency, authenticity (Banet-Weiser, 2012), and strategic alliances translate into economic and symbolic power (Cutler, 2017). This interplay reflects a broader shift where the boundaries between streetwear, high fashion and Black cultural production are increasingly blurred, recasting social capital as not just local connection but industry-level influence.

Ghetts' *IC3* (2021) exemplifies the layered dimensions of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), particularly through linguistic capital. Alongside Skepta, Ghetts delivers a powerful meditation on racialised life-worlds, structural confinement and transformation. Reflecting on his past, he raps: "Who would have thought back then, we'd be some powerful Black men? Back when we was in estates I was trapped in, trapping, y'all know how it's impacted us, can't block a nigga when flats are us." Here, Ghetts begins by establishing his upward social mobility (Forman, 2002) by asserting his social position and influence and proceeds to collapse spatial containment and socioeconomic marginalisation (Crane, 2000), by articulating how the urban estate becomes both a site of entrapment and a vessel for cultural resilience (Love, 2019). The lyrical interplay turns marginal spaces into sources of identity and power (Collins, 1990), underscoring how UK rap artists convert lived experience into cultural capital that resists erasure and affirms community knowledge. Skepta's contribution further underscores resistant and navigational capital, rejecting state recognition: "The Queen offered me the MBE, I said no and I raised my fist"; in favour of diasporic affirmation: "I went home, got my

[33] Virgil Abloh was a globally influential designer (Art Basel Magnificent Merchandise, 2022) and frequent collaborator with UK and US rappers.

[34] Matthew Williams was the creative director of Givenchy and founder of 1017 ALYX 9SM; his relationships with rappers illustrate cross-sector social capital.

[35] "Swag," from African American Vernacular English, refers to confident, stylish self-presentation. In hip-hop, it signals cultural identity, credibility, and social capital within Black urban contexts.

chieftaincy, now I'm back on the strip[36].” The symbolic contrast between empire and ancestral honour becomes a lyrical refusal to be co-opted into dominant systems of recognition (Banet-Weiser, 2012) and underlines that he would rather gain merit from his homeland than to a system that has disenfranchised him because of his reference to returning back to the ‘strip’. The track ultimately encapsulates all six tenets of Yosso’s (2005) CCW: linguistic dexterity, aspirational defiance, familial and social rootedness, navigational endurance, and a resistant politics grounded in historical awareness. Rather than merely surviving exclusion, Ghetts and Skepta lyrically reimagine Black Britishness as a sovereign mode of cultural capital that transcends deficit framings.

Taken as a whole, the lyrical examples in this section demonstrate how UK rap serves as a living archive of Afro-diasporic knowledge, interweaving material conditions, cultural pride and political refusal. Through the lens of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), UK rap emerges not only as a site of expression but as an active space of capital formation, where resistance, resilience and re-imagination are made audible. More than a reflection of lived realities, these lyrics function as a form of cultural currency that circulates within and beyond the community, accruing value through authenticity, creative labour and social meaning. Artists like Dave, Ghetts, Headie One, Skepta, Unknown T, and Bashy do not simply narrate hardship or success; they strategically mobilise and express aspirational, navigational, resistant, social and linguistic capital by embedding their lyrics with testimonies of survival, coded language and cultural references that speak directly to diasporic experiences. Through aspirational capital, they re-imagine success beyond white capitalist metrics (Yosso, 2005), often grounding ambition in familial uplift or communal pride. Resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) emerges through their critique of racism and systemic inequality, while social capital is activated in their references to affiliations, and the kinship networks that sustain Black life in Britain. Linguistic capital is the basis of UK rap, which reflects diasporic hybridity in black musical expressions (Gilroy, 1993; Yancy, 2019). In doing so, the rappers named construct a diasporic knowledge system that defies dominant narratives and reclaims value on culturally specific terms (Gilroy, 1993; Yosso, 2005). They inscribe new syntaxes of power and belonging (Hall, 1996), critique structural exclusion (Mbembe, 2001), while affirming alternative modes of wealth, mobility and futurity on their own terms (Eshun, 2003; Okafor, 2021), further aligning with Pan-Africanist ideologies (Nkrumah, 1963; Adesokan, 2011).

[36] The strip” is UK street slang referring to one’s local area or territory, especially in relation to informal economies or street-based activity. In UK rap, it often connotes both belonging and survival within marginalised urban spaces (Ilan, 2020; Whitt, 2021).

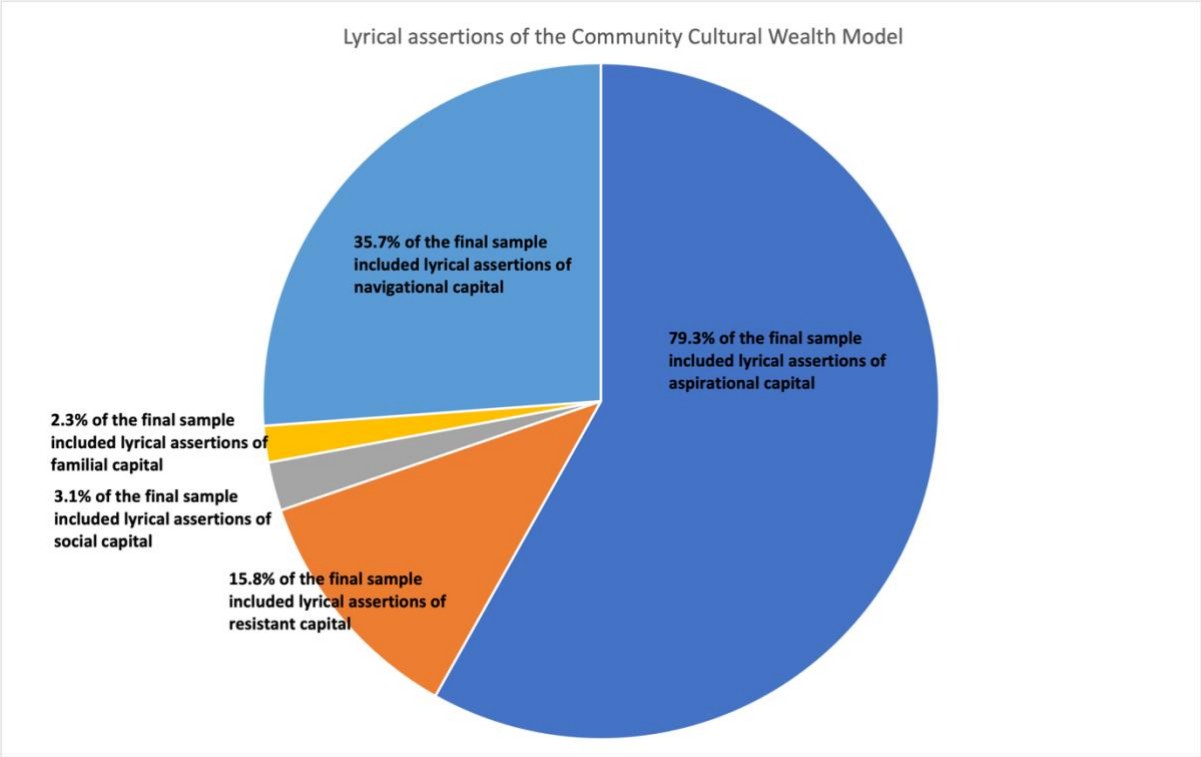

Figure 9: Pie chart representing the lyrical assertions of community cultural wealth forms in the final sample

To conclude, the data from figure nine illustrates a dominant emphasis on aspirational capital, which appears in 79.3% of the lyrical content sampled. This overwhelming presence suggests that UK rappers frequently deploy themes of ambition, futurity, and imagined mobility as key modes of self-assertion and survival (val (Yosso, 2005; Okafor, 2021). Such lyrics operate not merely as declarations of personal desire but as articulations of collective hope and a refusal to remain confined by socio-economic marginalisation (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996). Navigational capital is the next most prevalent (35.7%), indicating that artists often encode their ability to navigate hostile institutional landscapes; be it the carceral system, the education system, or the racialised economy, within their verses. Resistant capital, observed in 15.8% of the sample, marks explicit refusals of dominant norms and structures, revealing how UK rap lyrics function as insurgent critiques that challenge institutional power (Eshun, 2003; Yosso, 2005). In contrast, social capital (3.1%) and familial capital (2.3%) appear far less frequently, suggesting that although community ties and kinship remain important to many artists, they are less often foregrounded as central lyrical strategies. This distribution affirms that UK rap functions as a site where forward-looking empowerment, rooted in resilience, manoeuvrability and defiance, becomes a primary form of cultural currency.

6.4 Heritage Narratives in UK Rap

UK rap operates as a dynamic archive of diasporic memory, in which African and Caribbean heritage is not simply preserved but continually reimagined as a political and aesthetic resource (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990). Within the content analysis, two primary strategies emerge through which artists assert heritage: linguistic expression and declarative statements. Rather than treating heritage as static, UK rappers mobilise it through sonic texture, lyrical allusion and visual signifiers, transforming diasporic heritage itself into a potent form of cultural currency. This cultural currency, rooted in Black diasporic traditions of resistance, creativity and survival, is increasingly benefiting from global industries, including luxury fashion, which draws on its affective power while remaining structurally distant from the communities that produce it (Miller, 2011; Tulloch, 2004). Asante (2003) argues that Afrocentric epistemologies are anchored in communitarian ethos, ancestral remembrance and symbolic expression; foundational elements echoed in the work of artists like Ghetts, Skepta, Stefflon Don, and Fimiguerrero within this section. This heritage is not simply retrospective, but a living force of Black consciousness, identity-making and resistance.

Used as an example in the prior section, in *IC3* (2021), Skepta proclaims, “Soon as they told me about the power that came with the black skin, unlocked it, then I tapped in”, signalling an embodied awakening to diasporic heritage as a source of empowerment (Gilroy, 1993; Asante, 2003). His earlier assertion of choosing his Igbo chieftaincy (see Adesokan, 2011; *BBC*, 2018) over an MBE (O'Connor, 2017) as discussed earlier in the previous section rewrites the narrative of social legitimacy, privileging ancestral authority over colonial accolades. These lyrics encapsulate a Pan-Africanist impulse (krumah, 1963; Adesokan, 2011): a turn away from imperial recognition towards self-determined value systems grounded in African traditions (Asante, 2003; Eshun, 2003). Asante (2008) describes such gestures as a form of symbolic decolonisation, reclaiming historical consciousness as the basis of cultural integrity. Heritage, in this formulation, functions not as nostalgia but as insurgent memory, by reactivating ancestral knowledge, political histories, and diasporic identities as tools for contemporary resistance, critique, and self-determination (Hall, 1990; Asante, 2003; Gilroy, 1993). Through lyrical invocations of African and Caribbean consciousness (Davies, 2008), UK rappers animate what Davies (2008) calls diasporic remembering: a strategic mobilisation of cultural memory to contest marginalisation and reclaim power. This insurgent use of heritage, embedded in sonic and linguistic choices, also aligns with Yosso’s (2005) notion of resistant capital and affirms the role of Black cultural production as both historical testimony and political intervention.

Language becomes a crucial site of cultural transmission and resistance within UK rap, where diasporic expression is not only preserved but weaponised (Alim, 2009); heritage is affirmed, and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) is practiced. Artists such as Stefflon Don deploy linguistic hybridity: Jamaican Patois, West African Pidgin and British English, as modes of refusal against dominant linguistic and cultural hierarchies (James, 2020). Her lyrics in *Real Ting* (2016), "Some gyal ah hype, but dem nuh look right," channels Caribbean oral traditions (Cooper, 1995) into British urban soundscapes, enacting what Hall (1990) calls the "re-telling of the past" through new cultural forms. This linguistic polyphony asserts a diasporic lineage while unsettling the monolingual norms of white Britishness (Creese and Blackledge, 2010). Edwards (2009) describes these multilingual practices among diasporic youth as "cultural resourcefulness," a form of strategic identity-making that encodes both belonging and resistance. Shaybo's *Dobale* (2020) exemplifies this linguistic assertion through deliberate code-switching between English and Yoruba. The title itself: *Dobale*, meaning "to prostrate" in Yoruba (Adejunmobi, 2004), is a culturally loaded invocation of respect and ancestry, grounding the track in Nigerian tradition even as the sonic production remains firmly within the UK rap landscape. Shaybo's use of Yoruba is not incidental; it performs what Davies (2008) describes as diasporic remembering, where language becomes a conduit for ancestral reactivation and cultural pride in a British context often hostile to African linguistic presence. Similarly, in Skepta's verse on the *Warm* remix (2022), he invokes the Igbo phrase "Tufiakwa," an exclamation meaning "God forbid," to punctuate a moment of rejection and spiritual distancing (Okafor, 2021). This brief but potent use of Igbo reclaims African linguistic presence as a signifier of moral clarity and cultural depth, underscoring what Gilroy (1993) terms the counterculture of modernity inherent in Black Atlantic expression. These translingual gestures are more than stylistic flourishes; they constitute a sonic archive of Afro-diasporic heritage. Through such performances, language becomes a living repository of cultural memory, where heritage is activated as both resource and resistance. UK rap, in this formulation, operates as an Afro-diasporic cultural currency: a space in which linguistic, historical and spiritual inheritances are converted into aesthetic and political capital. By mobilising ancestral languages within a genre that is globally visible but locally grounded, artists like Stefflon Don, Shaybo and Skepta assert diasporic belonging on their own terms while pushing back against the erasures of colonial modernity (Asante, 2003; Yosso, 2005). As Thiong'o (1986) argues, language is not neutral; it carries memory, culture and worldview. Reclaiming it, especially in postcolonial contexts, becomes a potent act of resistance and self-definition.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Ghetts and Skepta's *IC3* (2021) serves as a layered text rich in cultural currency. Returning to the track here, it offers a particularly potent articulation of heritage as

both critique and reclamation. The lyrics, “Don’t tell me go back where I came from, while the Queen sits there in stolen jewels, cool, I go back with a chain on,” deliver a sharp postcolonial rebuke, linking the racialised exclusion of Black British people to Britain’s imperial legacy of extraction and domination (Bhambra, 2014). Yet this verse also activates what Yosso (2005) terms linguistic capital, particularly through its skilful use of double entendre[37]. The line “Cool, I go back with a chain on” encapsulates a duplexity of meaning: on one hand, “chain” evokes the violence of transatlantic slavery, where Black bodies were forcibly displaced and restrained; on the other, it invokes the contemporary hip-hop iconography of expensive jewellery; signifying status, resistance and a reversal of power. In this sense, storytelling in UK rap is not linear but palimpsestic, layering ancestral trauma with present-day assertion (Bradley, 2009; Alim, 2006). Such lyrical manoeuvres not only reframe the past but reposition the artist within it, reconfiguring heritage as both burden and badge. This re-signification of symbols — chains, jewels, stolen wealth — demonstrates how UK rap operates as a site where diasporic memory is reanimated through stylistic bravado and political critique. As Gilroy (1993) suggests, the Black Atlantic tradition has long relied on performative strategies to reclaim history and assert selfhood, and *IC3* exemplifies how linguistic skill becomes a method for the cultural survival of heritage and insurgent narration. UK rap makes heritage audible through sonic strategies. The term “IC3” itself, a UK police code for Black men (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021), becomes a site of re-signification. The chorus, “look in the mirror, I see king, I see me … I see who? I see what? IC3,” flips the logic of surveillance into one of self-recognition. As Ewoodzie (2017) argues, urban Black youth use music to assert visibility in the spaces where they are socially erased. This creative defiance resonates with Fatsis’ (2018) critique of the London Metropolitan Police’s criminalisation of UK drill and grime, where sonic expression is treated as evidence of criminality. In this context, tracks like “IC3” reclaim and politicise the very codes used to police Black identity, transforming criminalising gazes into affirmations of self and community (Ilan, 2020). The song thus weaponises state-imposed labels, transforming them into assertions of sovereignty. UK rap artists do not passively inherit heritage; they repurpose it as a mode of resistance (Yancy, 2008) and cultural production (Gilroy, 1993).

UK rap lyrical positioning sometimes speaks directly to radical Pan-Africanist thought, where heritage is not merely celebrated but activated as a tool for dismantling colonial legacies. Fanon (1963) argued that true liberation demands a rupture from the imposed identities of the coloniser, and that cultural

[37] Double entendre refers to a phrase that carries two meanings — in this case, both the literal history of enslavement ("chain" as bondage) and the contemporary symbol of success ("chain" as jewellery), allowing for layered political and cultural interpretation within the same lyrics.

expression must function as a weapon of revolution. Fimiguerrero's song *Immigrant* (2022) provides a particularly sharp articulation of heritage as a site of counter-narrative. The chorus: "In the end, I'm a wealthy immigrant", converts marginalised identity into a symbol of success. His following lyrics, "So the white man want my imprisonment," critiques the ongoing criminalisation of Black immigrants, while "Can't fuck with the African militant" asserts a defiant, politicised diasporic identity. The phrase does more than evoke pride; it aligns the speaker with Pan-Africanist legacies of struggle. The tension between racial precarity and economic power is underscored in "The money give me the white man privilege," a recognition that wealth offers only partial reprieve from racial hierarchy. Here, heritage functions as a framework for negotiating and contesting British racial capitalism. The interplay between economic success and racial surveillance mirrors what Wynter (2003) identifies as the ongoing struggle over who qualifies as fully human in colonial modernity. In this formulation, heritage is not a static inheritance but a mobilised resource through which UK rap artists claim political subjectivity and reorient diasporic identity towards liberation.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate how heritage in UK rap is not decorative but strategic: it is weaponised, stylised and recontextualised within a broader Afro-diasporic epistemology (Asante, 2003). Artists craft a rich tapestry of memory, style and critique that resists cultural eradication and draws on linguistic, familial, aspirational, resistant, navigational, and social capital concerning heritage by transforming inherited cultural knowledge into tools for survival, pride, and political expression, while asserting futurity. This aesthetic labour constitutes a form of cultural currency, one that luxury fashion brands increasingly seek to monetise without acknowledging the ancestral, communal, and political labour that underpins it. As UK rap continues to shape and be shaped by global industries, its engagement with heritage remains a critical reminder that Black cultural production is never just entertainment; it is history, identity, and insurgency made audible.

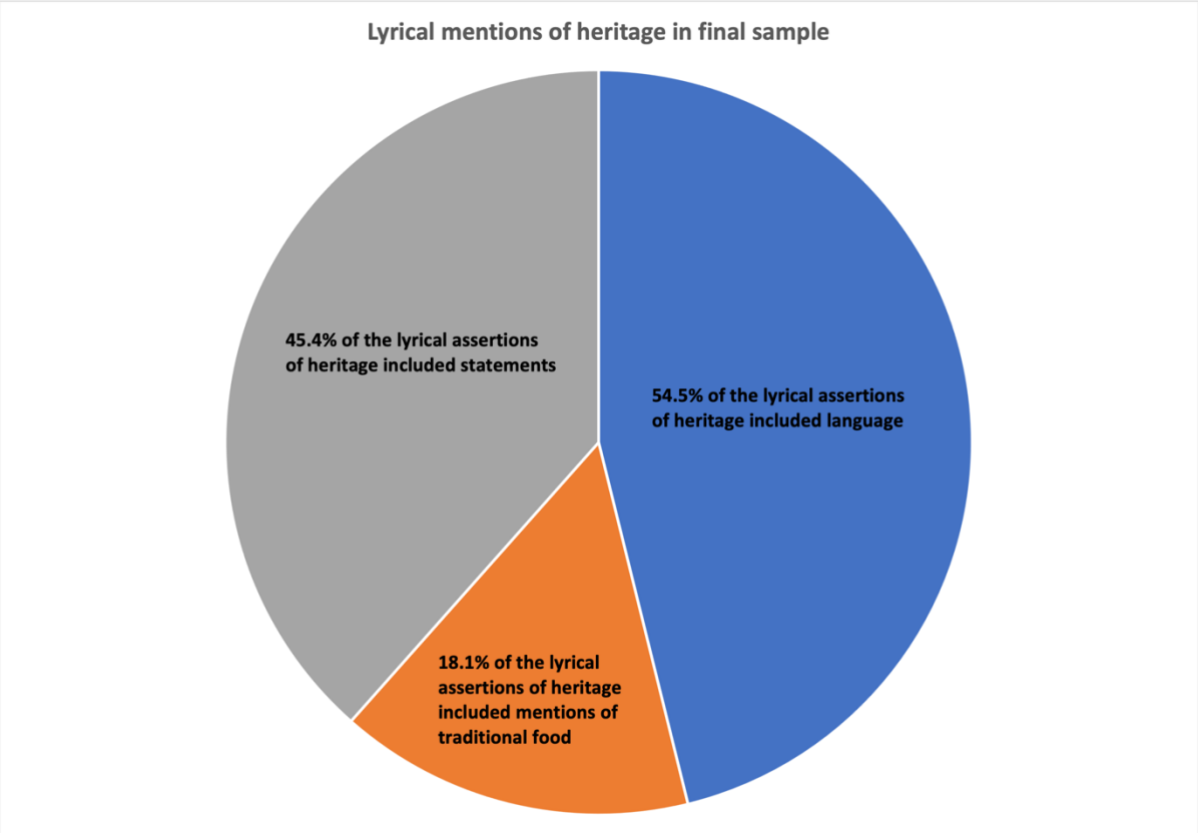

Figure 10: Pie chart representing the lyrical mentions of heritage in the final sample

The chart in figure ten representing lyrical references to heritage within the final sample reveals a multifaceted yet selective invocation of cultural identity in UK rap. The most significant proportion: 54.5% of these lyrical assertions relate to language, demonstrating how ancestral tongues, code-switching and linguistic hybridity, function as central tools for articulating diasporic belonging. These expressions reaffirm the role of linguistic capital within Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, while also aligning with broader Pan-Africanist ideologies that privilege orality and language retention as vehicles of cultural survival and resistance (Asante, 1988; Thiong'o, 1986). 45.4% of the references take the form of statements: lyrical affirmations of ethnic, national or cultural pride that locate artists within a global Black consciousness and situate UK rap within a broader African diasporic epistemology (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990). These statements often act as lyrical declarations of identity, reclaiming space within a postcolonial context that has historically marginalised African and Caribbean heritage in Britain. In contrast, only 18.1% of the mentions included references to traditional food, pointing to a less frequent assertion with every day or sensory aspects of heritage in the final sample. This underrepresentation may reflect the genre's lyrical economy, where language and direct assertion take precedence over more embodied or domestic signifiers pertaining to heritage.

Nevertheless, the data underscores how UK rap lyrics function as a rich site for heritage expression, with artists drawing on linguistic and declarative forms to reaffirm their cultural roots through familial capital (Yosso, 2005), assert diasporic knowledge systems, and challenge the erasure of African identity within dominant British narratives.

6.5 Lyrical expressions of double consciousness and hybridity

W.E.B. Du Bois' foundational concept of double consciousness articulates the psychological conflict experienced by Black individuals who navigate a world that positions them as both insiders and outsiders: "An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (Du Bois, 1903/1994, p. 2). This Afro-diasporic inner 'confusion' is vividly expressed in J Hus' *Comeback* (2023), particularly within the Black British context, through lines such as, "Warrior, I was in my home, but I was feelin' like a foreigner". Such lyrical ambivalence captures the dissonance Gilroy (1993) attributes to the diasporic condition; the constant negotiation between imposed national narratives (Hall, 1990; Brah, 1996) and suppressed ancestral ties. Here, J Hus conveys a deep sense of displacement and identity fragmentation, despite being physically situated in a space that should offer belonging. This echoes Lash's reflections in Chapter Five on Skepta's experience growing up: inside the home, he was in Nigeria, but the moment he stepped outside, he was in England. Such moments articulate the duality of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903); the sense of always navigating multiple cultural selves. This dissonance reflects the bifurcation of the self that Du Bois (1903) identified, an enduring psychic split for Black individuals navigating incompatible demands of identity. J Hus' lyrics in *Comeback*, "When you know yourself, you stand tall," move beyond sheer self-awareness; his lyrics imply the need for rootedness in heritage as a stabilising force amid the flux of diasporic identity (Okolosie, 2014). In this context, ancestral connection becomes not only a means of affirming selfhood but also a counter to the alienation inherent in double consciousness (Fanon, 1967). As argued and evidenced in the previous section, UK Afro-diasporic rappers such as Skepta and Ghetts frequently mobilise cultural memory and lineage as sources of empowerment. Gilroy's (1993) formulation of diaspora consciousness: emerging from "routes" rather than "roots", is thereby complicated; while identity is shaped in motion, it is the invocation of ancestral continuities that helps anchor the self. This corresponds with Fanon's (1967) assertion that reclaiming cultural heritage is central to resisting colonial alienation and aligns with Pan-Africanist principles that locate liberation in the collective recovery of African identity across dispersed geographies (Asante, 2003; Adéèkó, 2009; Wright, 2004).

While UK rappers engage with Western cultural influences and navigate the structural realities of British society; drawing on double consciousness as a form of mental resilience (Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1967), their artistic expressions remain rooted in a collective African consciousness and the African cultural system (Asante, 1988; Richards, 1980; Holloway, 2005). This shared sensibility informs how they resist, negotiate, or reframe dominant norms. Skepta's lyrics "I'm not a gentleman, I'm an African man" (*Pure Water,* 2018) directly invoke Fela Kuti's legendary assertion: "I no be gentleman at all o, I be Africa man original" (*Gentleman*, 1973). In British culture, the term "gentleman" is historically coded with classed and colonial meanings (Kelso, 1925; Terci, 2013). By rejecting this label, Skepta centres Africanness as his primary identity marker, thereby unsettling normative constructions of civility (Skeggs, 2004), masculinity (Connell, 1995) and respectability (Higginbotham, 1993). His lyrics embody a broader Pan-African strategy of refusal (Adéèkó, 2009), through which UK rappers can assert allegiance to African ways over British assimilationist ideals. This act of refusal operates within the logic of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903), wherein the rapper navigates the internal tensions of being both Black and British (Gilroy, 1993). Rather than seeking resolution between these positions, Skepta uses the 'paradox' as a site of resistance (Hall, 1996), refusing the pressure to conform to dominant British norms while simultaneously operating within British cultural space. In doing so, he leverages the duality of double consciousness not as a burden, but as a strategic mode of cultural survival and self-definition that foregrounds African heritage as a source of pride and power (Asante, 2003; Wright, 2004).

Serving again as an example, Shaybo's *Dobale* (2020) offers a compelling gendered lens into double consciousness. Her repeated use of Yoruba: "Dobale, dobale, the queen has entered, je kin sokale
E dobale, e dobale" demonstrates how UK African diasporic identity is actively negotiated through language, particularly within the context of British cultural norms and expectations. As discussed in the previous section, my content analysis of UK rap songs released between 2014 and 2024 highlights how linguistic markers such as Yoruba, Patois or Pidgin serve as key signifiers of heritage (Thiong'o, 1986). Yet these same forms of expression also point to the layered experience of cultural divergence (Alim, 2009; Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Blommaert, 2010). Shaybo's seamless movement between Yoruba and English enacts the kind of cultural doubling Du Bois (1903) described as "two-ness": the internal conflict of being both African and British, shaped by colonial legacies and systemic exclusion. In this way, language becomes not only a means of asserting ancestral pride (Baker, 2000), but also a site of negotiation (Pennycook, 2010), signalling the dual consciousness required (Du Bois, 1903; Gilroy, 1993) to move through conflicting cultural worlds.

Although not centred on language per se but rather on accent, this is illustrated in the following example. While not included in my final content analysis sample, manifestations of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; Gilroy, 1993) are clearly echoed in JME's freestyle verse in *Boy Better Know Freestyle: Skepta, JME, Frisco & Jammer* (GRM Gold), where he declares: "Wanna know about me? Here we go, half Yoruba, half Igbo," rapped in a distinctly London accent. The juxtaposition of ethnic self-identification with British urban vernacular (Hewitt, 1986) encapsulates the performative and linguistic complexity of double consciousness, or what could even be perceived as triple consciousness because of the interplay of race, ethnicity and nationality. As Yosso (2005) argues, linguistic capital allows marginalised communities to navigate multiple social worlds. JME's lyrics collapse national, ethnic, and urban identities into a single utterance, making the Afro-diasporic hybridity that underpins Black British subjectivity audible and a clear component of contemporary UK Afro-diasporic cultural currency through UK rap.

The sonic dimensions of each track mentioned in this section articulate the layered dynamics of diasporic identity. The lyrical declarations in J Hus' songs, the Yoruba chants in Shaybo's *Dobale*, and the grime palette of JME's flow whilst proclaiming ancestral heritage reveal how sound becomes a site where double consciousness is audibly negotiated. These musical choices express the tension between ancestral affiliation and British urban life; what Gilroy (1993) identifies as the hybridity of the Black Atlantic. Far from being mere aesthetic flourishes, these elements function as sonic enactments of diasporic duality, capturing the ongoing negotiation between tradition and futurity, rootedness and movement. Hybridity offers an expanded frame for understanding these negotiations. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space," hybridity operates not as cultural fusion but as a site of negotiation where power, identity and memory clash and coalesce. In UK rap, hybridity surfaces in accent, religion and street vernacular (Alim *et al*., 2009; Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Pennycook, 2010). These dynamics are especially visible in artists like Skepta and J Hus, who encode Black Britishness through cultural signifiers that resist assimilation. Gilroy (1993) suggests that diasporic identity is restless and recombinant; a view borne out in the stylistic and lyrical hybridity of these artists.

Hybridity in UK rap is not a stylistic flourish (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990); it crystallises Du Bois' (1903) notion of double consciousness as a lived, everyday reality for Afro-diasporic artists negotiating the contradictions of belonging. J Hus exemplifies this hybridity most clearly. In *Comeback* (2023), he invokes both ancestral and Islamic references that construct a layered identity. The lyrics "Juju J, you're movin' mad, rollin' with the same stick that Musa had" references both West African spiritual

practices (Juju) (Drewal, 1992; Olupona, 2004) and the Qur'anic figure of Musa (Moses) (Haleem, 2010), fusing aspects of African spiritual tradition, Islamic elements and street vernacular into a single verse. Rather than a contradiction, this conflation signifies what Bhabha (1994) calls the third space: a site where new meanings are forged from colonial and cultural entanglements. Here, "Juju" does not denote superstition but signals a continuing spiritual influence within diasporic Black communities, while "the same stick that Musa had" references prophetic power and divine intervention in Islam (Hackett, 2012. This lyrical hybridity refuses to separate the so-called 'traditional' African spirituality from Abrahamic religion; instead, it positions both as active epistemologies in the Afro-diasporic present (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Bangura, 2005). As such, J Hus's lyrics affirm Hall's (1990) argument that diasporic identities are always in flux, entangled across histories, geographies and belief systems. Hybridity in UK rap, then, is not peripheral to double consciousness; it is its sonic and cultural expression, allowing artists like J Hus to navigate Britishness not as a fixed identity but as an evolving, contested space of meaning-making (Hall, 1996).

To close, these lyrical and sonic articulations underscore the ways in which UK rap serves as a vital archive of diasporic experience; one that does not simply reflect the fractured realities of double consciousness but actively reconfigures them. By mobilising spiritual, linguistic and ancestral signifiers, artists like J Hus, Shaybo and Jme construct a form of diasporic potency that resists reductive binaries and embraces multiplicity as a source of cultural agency. This refusal to be legible through dominant frameworks of race, nationality or religion marks UK rap as a space of insurgent knowledge production, where identity is 'performed', negotiated and remade through sound. Rather than seeking coherence, these artists lean into 'contradiction', using hybridity not only as an aesthetic mode but as a tool for survival and self-definition within the entangled realities of Black British life. In doing so, UK rappers offer distinct cultural currency through sonic and lyrical form; expressive modes through which Afro-diasporic (youth) subjectivities articulate themselves on their own terms: fragmented yet whole, marginal yet generative, always in motion yet rooted in cultural memory and community (Gilroy, 1993; Moten, 2003).

6.6 UK rap lyrics as sites of Decolonisation

Skepta's *Man* (2016) acts as a sharp example of UK Afro-diasporic retention and resistance, aligning with the broader decolonial struggle to reclaim space, dignity and cultural self-definition (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). His assertion: "Came a long way from when Whites never used to mix with Blacks, now all my White niggas and my Black mates, we got the game on smash"; marks a refusal to forget the UK's history of racial exclusion (Back, 1996) while asserting diasporic presence and power in contemporary culture (Osborne, 2020), along with a sense of new generational unity and progression. Skepta's lyrics resonate with Fanon's (1961) proposition that colonial oppression lives on not only in institutions but in cultural memory and interpersonal relationships. Skepta's reversal of racialised slang in the line "now all my White niggas and my Black mates" is a striking instance of linguistic subversion (Alim, 2006). By applying the historically Black-coded term "niggas" (Cutler, 2017) to white friends, and the more neutral "mates" (Cheshire *et al*., 2011) to Black peers, he disrupts normative racial language codes, unsettling colonial constructions of who belongs where in the sociolinguistic order (Flores and Rosa, 2015), and inadvertently promoting togetherness. Again, this inversion reflects what Thiong'o (1986) terms the decolonisation of the mind, where language is reclaimed as a site of resistance, even though not indigenous. Skepta's lyrics also align with Gilroy's (2002) view of Black Atlantic cultures being able to use language creatively to navigate and contest racial boundaries. Skepta's wordplay is more than clever lyricism; it functions as a decolonial act via linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) that subverts rigid racial binaries. In this way, Skepta also enacts resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). *Man* (2016) functions as a decolonial performance, reclaiming space and resisting cultural erasure by asserting the evolution of Black British youth within the working-class cultural politics of London.

Language also operates as a decolonial strategy in Skepta's *Man* (2016). His lyrics: "Man talk slang so the feds can't work out what I just said to a man"; mobilises and exemplifies the decolonial effects of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005), where culturally grounded modes of communication are used to navigate unequal power structures (Alim, 2006). Enslaved Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade frequently used language strategically to resist domination, developing coded speech, pidgin or creole forms (Holloway, 2005; Rickford, 1999; Morgan, 2002) that confounded colonial surveillance (Alleyne, 1980)). In British colonial contexts, for example, West African communities used Pidgin English to communicate across ethnic groups while preserving cultural knowledge inaccessible to colonial officials (Faraclas, 1996). Similarly, during slavery and colonial rule, Jamaican Maroons and other Afro-Caribbean groups embedded double meanings into their speech and songs to organise

resistance (Bilby, 2005). These practices echo what Scott (1990) terms hidden transcripts (as discussed in Chapter One): everyday acts of resistance expressed in veiled language. As Thiong'o (1986) argues, reclaiming language is central to decolonisation, as language encodes memory, resistance and worldviews. The colonial project begins with the suppression of language, erasing indigenous epistemologies through linguistic domination (Thiong'o, 1986). While Skepta's slang is not indigenous in the traditional sense, Black British vernacular, rooted in Caribbean, African, and working-class London influences, carries diasporic memory and operates as both an assertion of identity and a refusal of assimilation (Alim, 2016; Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Hewitt, 1986). Such decolonial strategies resonate with contemporary UK rap, where artists like Skepta deploy slang to shield meaning from institutional scrutiny and racialised policing (Fatsis, 2018), all whilst affirming cultural identity. *Man* (2016) further illustrates the linguistic dimension of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), where language is a tool for surviving hostile spaces while retaining cultural distinctiveness.

In *Point and Kill* (2021), Little Simz articulates a Pan-African political voice through her lyrics: "Tell my people, 'rise up,' can never be silenced, you think we're apologetic, I think we're defiant." The lyrics are a deliberate refusal of neo-colonial expectations of subservience or silence (Nkrumah, 1963; Nyerere, 1968). Her unapologetic tone is emblematic of what Nyerere (1968) called the need for cultural decolonisation; the psychological reclamation of Black pride and sovereignty. The call to "rise up" also echoes Nkrumah's (1963) anti-colonial speeches and Garvey's (1923) commitment to Black elevation through unity and cultural pride (Martin, 1986). Crucially, Little Simz weaves in Nigerian Pidgin, centring Afro-diasporic knowledge systems: "Family no go suffer, oh, inna my lifetime, dey be fine, do am proper, no lie, lie." Using West African speech forms, her lyricism not only repositions diasporic identity within African epistemologies (Mbembe, 2002), but also expresses aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) by declaring an unrelenting commitment to intergenerational uplift and stability. This is articulated not through Western frameworks of success, but through a culturally rooted ethos of care, responsibility and continuity grounded in Afro-diasporic values (Boyce Davies, 1994). In *Point and Kill* (2021), the communal ethic directly challenges neoliberal individualism by centring kinship, duty, and generational care (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001) over self-interest (Mbembe, 2001), while simultaneously affirming a diasporic linguistic inheritance (Adejunmobi, 2004). In doing so, the track becomes an act of neo-decolonial resistance manifested through linguistic and familial capital (Yosso, 2005).

J Hus's *Deeper Than Rap* (2023) also performs decolonial work by foregrounding suppressed histories and challenging internalised colonial mentalities. He raps: "No Blacks, no dogs, we were segregated,

they took our history, then they went and erased it, I'm just a roadman[38], so why am I preachin'?" These lines document Britain's legacy of racism and historical erasure (El-Enany, 2020), engaging directly with Rodney's (1972) critique of colonial education systems. J Hus reclaims intellectual authority through cultural memory, countering colonial narratives that paint Black working-class men as unintellectual (Noxolo, 2017). The question "so why am I preachin'?" is rhetorical: it asserts that Black consciousness can emerge from the street as much as from academia (Eze, 2016). This refusal to separate 'road' knowledge from political knowledge exemplifies the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) embedded in UK rap. In the same track, J Hus challenges postcolonial alienation and its enduring impact on education and racialised beauty standards, exposing the urgent need to decolonise school systems and dominant aesthetic ideals (Eddo-Lodge, 2017; Fanon, 1952): "God made you sexy, so why you bleachin'? How you send your son to school and don't know what they teach him?". These lyrics expose the psychic afterlife of colonialism, echoing Fanon's (1952) analysis of the colonised subject's internalised self-hatred and disconnect from historical truths. Skin bleaching functions as a lyrical metaphor for epistemicide, symbolising the whitening of both mind and body (Wane, 2008). *Deeper than Rap* (2020) aligns with Nkrumah's (1963) Pan-Africanist vision, in which reclaiming pride in Blackness is not only a cultural imperative but also a revolutionary act of resistance against colonial aesthetic hierarchies.

Ms Banks' *Daily Duppy* (2022) expands the decolonial scope of UK rap by affirming Black womanhood and economic self-determination. She declares, "I'm really pretty and I'm Black," countering Eurocentric beauty norms (hooks, 1992) and asserting visibility as a political tool (Crenshaw, 1991). Her line resonates with Adichie's (2014) call for unapologetic Black femininity and the redefinition of beauty from within. By linking beauty with pride rather than conformity (Taylor, 2016), Ms Banks challenges the colonial gaze that has historically marginalised Black women (Collins, 2000). Moreover, her declaration — "Make six figures a year, nuttin less" — subverts economic exclusion by asserting financial autonomy Mirza, 1997. This intersects with Collins' (2000) theorisation of self-definition as central to Black feminist epistemology, where material success is not simply individual gain but a form of collective empowerment. Ms Banks' proclaimed wealth becomes a form of cultural currency — a resistance to both racism and patriarchy — demonstrating how UK rap channels aspirational capital into decolonial praxis.

[38] Roadman is a colloquial British term referring to a young man associated with urban street culture, often linked to working-class Black British communities. The term can imply involvement in street-level hustle or survival economies, but also carries cultural connotations of authenticity, style, and resistance (Brotherton *et al.,* 2021).

Taken together, the lyrical interventions examined in this section position UK rap as a critical terrain for decolonial meaning-making; where Pan-African consciousness is not simply articulated, but lived through rap. The songs by Skepta, Little Simz, J Hus and Ms Banks reflect more than resistance to colonial residues; they enact a reworlding of Black diasporic subjectivity, grounded in cultural memory, intergenerational aspiration and the reclamation of dignity. These artists transform language, embodiment and aesthetics into tools of epistemic 'disobedience', unsettling Eurocentric paradigms of beauty, intellect, and legitimacy (Mignolo, 2011). Fundamentally, such decolonial practices reshape the terms of cultural currency itself, complicating how UK rap engages with, and is appropriated by, the luxury fashion industry. Rather than passively assimilating into elite cultural spaces, these artists enter having already articulated decolonial positions, thereby recalibrating visibility and legitimacy on their own terms.

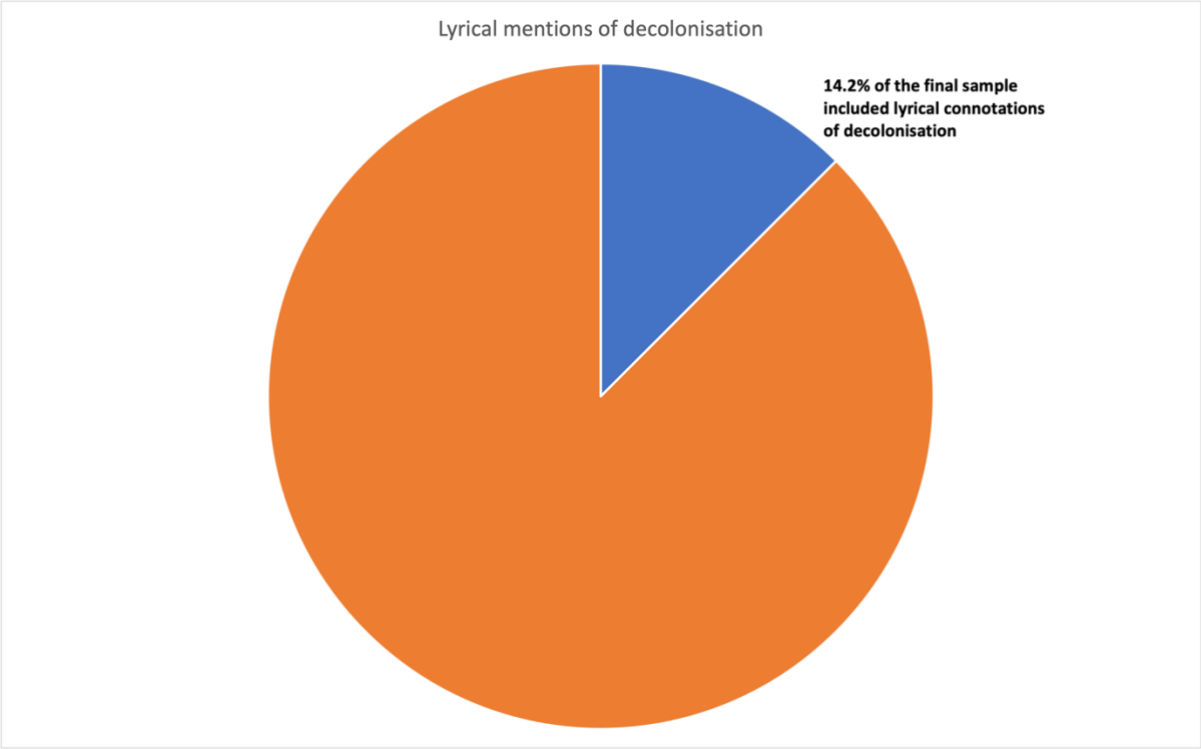

Figure 11: Pie chart representing lyrical mentions or suggestions of decolonisation in the final sample

Only 14.2% of the final lyrical sample explicitly referenced themes aligned with decolonisation in figure eleven, indicating that while UK rap contains traces of decolonial thought, it is not yet a dominant or overt lyrical discourse. This limited frequency suggests that decolonial praxis may be more often diffused through broader expressions of resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) or embedded in subtextual critiques of imperial legacies, rather than expressed directly. Artists such as Skepta, Little Simz, and J

Hus gesture toward decoloniality through linguistic reclamation, Pan-Africanist references and critiques of British institutional power, but these interventions often remain structurally implicit rather than ideologically foregrounded. The relative scarcity of direct decolonial content may also signal a disjuncture between academic or activist articulations of decolonisation (Mignolo, 2007) and the expressive logics of UK rap, which privilege coded language, metaphor, and lived experience. Nevertheless, even at 14.2%, these lyrical gestures function as potent acts of epistemic refusal; challenging colonial hierarchies of knowledge (Smith, 1999), aesthetics (hooks, 1995) and value (Mbembe, 2001), and should not be underestimated. Their presence affirms UK rap's role as a site of cultural resistance and re-imagining, where alternative modes of identity, heritage, and sovereignty are negotiated, even when not explicitly named as decolonial.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how UK rap lyrics serve as a dynamic site of cultural currency, where artists articulate and mobilise Yosso's (2005) forms of community cultural wealth, particularly aspirational, navigational, resistant and linguistic capital. These lyrical strategies reflect not only survival and ambition within hostile environments but also a diasporic knowledge system that affirms African heritage and critiques dominant value systems. Luxury brand references, far from superficial, are recoded in UK rap as signifiers of power, survival, agency and self-definition. While luxury brands benefit from the cultural capital of being named in this lyrical context, oppositional or critical lyrics reveal that these associations are not always flattering or commercially 'positive', highlighting a more complex, ambivalent relationship. Heritage emerges strongly through linguistic expression and declarative pride, reinforcing Afro-diasporic continuity. However, the underrepresentation of familial and social capital, alongside the marginal presence of Black feminine constructs and overt decolonial content, signals ongoing exclusions within both the lyrical field and the structures it reflects. Nevertheless, the data confirms that UK rap remains a vital site for asserting identity, reconfiguring cultural value, and expressing forms of epistemic resistance. The next chapter deepens the analysis of the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion through a focused case study on Skepta, whose work exemplifies many of the dynamics explored and offers a compelling case through which to examine this cultural exchange.

Chapter Seven: The Skepta Case Study

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a focused case study of Skepta, one of the most influential figures in UK rap, to examine how his aesthetic evolution and public image intersect with the structures of luxury fashion, cultural wealth and neoliberal visibility. Through a discussion of his lyrics (although his lyrics also featured in the previous dedicated chapter to content analysis), styling, brand affiliations and visual imagery, this chapter investigates how Skepta navigates and reshapes the symbolic economy of UK rap, moving between resistance and market assimilation without sacrificing cultural specificity. His career reflects broader shifts in how Afro-diasporic style, Black British identity, and urban masculinity are commodified, contested and celebrated within neoliberal cultural economies.

The chapter begins by contextualising Skepta's cultural position, introducing his early fashion politics and positioning him as an artist operating outside the traditional centres of prestige. It then explores how Skepta employs fashion as a form of cultural labour and creative self-fashioning. Drawing on Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth, this chapter considers how Skepta's aesthetic choices reflect and mobilise aspirational, navigational, linguistic and resistant capital. The chapter then turns to questions of Black ownership and economic self-determination, examining how Skepta's fashion ventures and brand affiliations challenge dominant structures of creative control and value production. Following this, the analysis investigates the strategic role of the stylist in shaping Skepta's public image. Through the interview conducted with Vernon, this section interrogates how authenticity is co-produced and how styling mediates the relationship between Black creative autonomy and fashion politics.

The chapter then goes on to situate Skepta's trajectory within the wider structures of neoliberalism. Here, the chapter explores how his alignment with luxury brands does not mark a capitulation to market logics, but rather reveals his strategic negotiation of visibility, value and survival within a racialised economy of commodified authenticity. Together, these sections argue that Skepta's relationship with luxury fashion is neither a rejection nor an embrace of neoliberalism, but a mode of navigating it; a dynamic interplay between self-authorship, cultural labour and market legibility. By unpacking the styling and circulation of Skepta's image, the chapter highlights how the intersection of

UK rap and luxury fashion stages complex negotiations of race, authenticity and economic capital, while also tracing Skepta's own convoluted and evolving relationship with the luxury sphere.

7.2 "Yeah, I used to wear Gucci; put it all in the bin 'cause that's not me"

Skepta is a renowned and esteemed UK rap artist and trailblazer in the luxury fashion sphere, evidenced by his various industry affiliations, collaborations and projects. At the outset of my research journey, I was confident that he would be an appropriate case study for this thesis. He elucidates the complex interplay between luxury brands and UK rap within his lyrics, demonstrating that identity is cardinal in the realm of UK rap. Ladoja clarifies the rationale behind considering Skepta as a pertinent case study for examining the integration of UK rap within the luxury fashion domain:

> The reason I think Skepta is really integral in the UK side is because, with him, his contemporaries were like A$AP Rocky and A$AP Nast … it was like the US guys, and then Skepta was the British icon in that … the person that was able to … have that impact here in the UK. (See Appendix 2, 00:06:37)

Skepta has demonstrated how a UK rapper can relate to luxury fashion brands differently from their US rap counterparts, echoing the discussion in differences between how UK and US rap intersect with luxury brands in Chapter Five. Unlike his American contemporaries, Skepta is one of the pioneers of the criminalised and demonised genre, grime (Fatsis, 2018; Fatsis, 2019; Hall, Khan and Eslea, 2022), with clothing facets that contrast the flamboyance and materialism of US rap (Miller, 2011; Podoshen *et al*., 2014; Adams, 2018; Parker, 2022). Contrary to US rap artists who are typically known for branded entertainment through their lyrics (Farwell, Stickle and Shackelford, 2023), Skepta has not always displayed the same veneration of luxury brands in his songs. This section is titled after the lyrics in his 2014 song, *That's Not Me*, where he raps about throwing Gucci and Louis Vuitton in the bin because they did not align with his identity. Ladoja states: "One of his most prominent lyrics that got him … his Mercury Prize … was when he spoke about throwing the Louis Vuitton in the bin" (See Appendix 2, 00:11:04). Ladoja's account indicates the recognition Skepta received for his display of authenticity, which challenges the idea that rap music must depict an extravagant lifestyle and mindset associated with clothing (Davis, 2011, p.11), and that brand mentions in lyrics are solely forms of brand/product placements and strategic moves towards a partnership (Delattre and Colovic, 2009; Van Vaerenbergh *et al*., 2011; Farwell *et al*., 2023). *That's Not Me* (2014) exhibits that luxury brands

were not always 'cool' or desirable for Skepta; his rebuking of luxury brands challenges rap stereotypes of conspicuousness (Chandler and Chandler-Smith, 2005, p. 241; Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023) and serves as an example that sets UK rap culture apart from those notions.

Despite Skepta's indifference towards luxury brands in *That's Not Me* (2014), of the one hundred and twenty-six songs selected for this thesis' final content analysis sample, thirty-four are either by or feature Skepta, as mentioned in Chapter Four. The songs contain various mentions of luxury brands, highlighting a shift in the context in which Skepta has referenced luxury brands. Ladoja discusses his 2008 track *Rolex Sweep*, which showcases the showy elements associated with rap music (Chandler and Chandler-Smith, 2005, p. 241), but she juxtaposes his subsequent apathy towards luxury brands in 2014:

> It was all about, like, wearing my Rolex … being flashy, being luxurious, etcetera. And that was really important at that time because I felt like it was … that turning point for Skepta, where he went back to his roots of like, you know, bringing it down before bringing it up, it was really kind of based on mindset … Skepta was kind of … closing the door on Rolex sweep because he didn't feel like they wanted him to be part of it, it wasn't a culture that was embracing him. … Rolex were not giving anyone watches … people were not giving anyone clothes. (See Appendix 2, 00:02:38 - 00:04:01)

The "bringing it down before bringing it up" statement by Ladoja asserts how Skepta reverted to what felt authentic to him — a shift exemplified in the transition from *Rolex Sweep* to *That's Not Me*. Rather than seeking validation within the realm of luxury, he chose instead to embody what had always accepted him and where he came from: the streets. "A lot of rappers are just people growing up in estates in London." As Lash discussed in Chapter Five, UK rappers typically come from council housing estates (Barron, 2013; Bramwell, 2015; Adams, 2018; Beswick, 2019). This includes Skepta, who grew up on the Meridian Estate in North London's Tottenham (Moran, 2022, pp. 140–160), a space he repeatedly references in his music (*Meridian Walk*, Skepta and Jme, 2003; *N17 8EG*, Skepta, Jme, Gemini and Benny Bizzie, 2008; *Man*, Skepta, 2016). Within estates, there is strength in community (Leaney, 2019), a sense of belonging (Khazbak, 2021; Sheringham *et al*., 2021), and a brewing of Black cultural expression and talent inspired by the streets (Bramwell, 2011; Barron, 2013; Bramwell, 2015) — and owned by the streets, as articulated in the lyrics of Skepta's brother, Jme, as discussed in Chapter Six. The cultivation of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), particularly regarding

resistant capital, is seen in council housing estates and Black working-class youth, fostering a sustained disregard for seeking acceptance in the realm of luxury fashion, as seen with tracksuits in Chapter Five. Resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) is evident in Skepta's display of oppositional behaviour (McLaren, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solórzano and Delgado, 2001), which is anchored in his working-class identity and seen in his lyrics. Instead of pandering to the luxury fashion industry, he challenged societal messages that devalue Blackness (Ward, 1996) and the lack of acceptance and racial equity within the luxury fashion industry (Ritch *et al*., 2023, pp.105–114). Skepta reverted to the streets through dress, which is illuminated in his song *Shutdown* (2015), where he raps, "Went to the show sitting in the front row in the black tracksuit and it's shutdown." In Chapter Five, the reader has already seen the relevance of sitting in the front row at Fashion Week. The lyrics explicitly emphasise the act of opposing and subverting through clothing (Benda, 2021) in elite spaces. Despite being seated in the front row of a fashion show, Skepta intentionally underlines an anti-fashion stance that serves as a symbol of defiance (Cunningham and Lab, 1991, p. 14) through the proclamation of wearing a tracksuit, which contradicts the typical attire associated with such an event; everyday dress can be a medium of dissent (Benda, 2021, p.18). Ladoja expands on Skepta's genuineness in his identity: "He also has the downtown edge. He's never going to lose who he is" (See Appendix 2, 00:59:15). The deliberate clothing choice expressed in *Shutdown* amplifies Skepta's working-class background and identity (Romero, 2012; Özdil, 2021) as a default in an environment that has not always been accepting of him.

Skepta's authenticity has been his asset in traversing the luxury fashion sphere, while defiance has been his shield. He has successfully manoeuvred the high-end fashion sector, which was not created with Black people in mind (Pham, 2017), echoing the concept of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). "It's a lot of looking at what is authentic. … it's definitely played a role in how his brand has been received" (See Appendix 2, 00:59:40). Ladoja's comment underlines two considerations: first, authenticity is core in Skepta's identity (Miller, 2011, p.14). Second, contrary to the belief that authenticity is a myth when it comes to a musician's identity, based on the assumption that their identity is derived from pre-established cultural preferences and beliefs (Strinati, 1995, p. 43), Skepta's indifference to luxury brands as seen in his lyrics opposes the cultural tastes and values that US rap has championed regarding luxury fashion (Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012; Chandler and Chandler-Smith, 2005, p. 241). Thus, as Ladoja explains, authenticity has been paramount in Skepta's journey to assimilating into the luxury fashion industry. Skepta's captivation and trailblazing demeanour are based on community, originality, authenticity and roots, which draw in audiences (Miller, 2011) and have influenced UK rappers who have looked up to him:

> And when their pioneer and their icon is saying … you know what? We're not gonna really partake in places or things with people that don't accept us. … That's a strong thing to say. And you know, you gotta think in 2014 when that happened, what impact that would have had on all the younger artists coming up behind Skepta, like Stormzy or Jhus or Dave … they would have been like, 'oh, we don't need to'. That's why kind of everyone defaulted back to tracksuits (See Appendix 2, 00:11:24).

Skepta's earlier indifference to luxury brands and his influence on the younger UK rappers reverting to tracksuits that Ladoja discusses emphasises how fashion can serve as a direct means for individuals to establish connections with others or reject mainstream values by conveying shared anti-fashion styles (Breward *et al*., 2023, pp.969–993). Her statement also underscores how Skepta's intricate path into the luxury fashion scene, fuelled by his sincerity, non-conformity, defiance and iconoclastic approach to clothing expectations and apathy towards acceptance from luxury brands, profoundly impacted younger UK rappers. They saw by example that authenticity was far more important than being accepted. Researchers disagree on conceptualising and evaluating authenticity, debating whether authenticity is always desirable, why people are motivated to be authentic, and the nature of authenticity (Jongman-Sereno and Leary, 2019). However, to emphasise how authenticity is not only desirable for UK rappers but also how Skepta's authenticity has caused the ripple effect that Ladoja discusses, I draw on Schmader and Sedikides' (2017) state authenticity as fit to the environment (SAFE) conceptual framework. This framework is based on individuals striving to "be themselves" and how they gravitate toward situations in which they fit in and distance themselves from situations they feel they do not belong. SAFE allows for an understanding of how social identities within excluded groups impact individuals' approach or avoidance of certain environments (Schmader and Sedikides, 2017). Skepta's social identity as a Black artist in the UK has had a significant impact on other Black rappers, leading them to disregard the need to procure luxury brands that have been hesitant to embrace them. The butterfly effect of Skepta's *That's Not Me,* and *Shutdown* lyrics and his vocal indifference to luxury brands is reflected in the SAFE framework and an appetite to remain authentic, which young rappers resonate with, underlining the profound cultural meaning of his journey as a rap artist.

Skepta's recent lyrics depict his shift from disassociating himself from luxury brands (*That's Not Me*, Skepta, 2014) and embracing an anti-fashion persona (Cunningham and Lab, 1991, p. 14), to name-

dropping luxury brands and products: " Yeah, Vivienne Westwood suit" (*Still*, 2017); "Could be Jacquemus, could be Azzedine Alaïa" (*St Tropez*, 2020). He also uses brand names to underscore various contexts, such as expressing admiration for women: "I like the way she walk in the Prada" (*Nirvana*, 2021). Such lyrics address the relationship between mating motives and luxury brands, suggesting that women might strategically utilise luxury brands to attract men romantically (Chen *et al*., 2022). His preference for Bottega Veneta is evident: "Could've been Bottega, might've been McQueen" (Skepta, *Peace of Mind*, 2021); "Who's that boy in the new Bottega" (Skepta, *Eyes on Me*, 2021), which is a result of the social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005) that I discussed earlier in Chapters Four and Five regarding personal relationships with designers. Equally, his lyrics still dismiss other brands: "I cannot rock no Amiri Jeans (No)" (Skepta, *Peace of Mind*, 2021), but this time, the lyrics can be perceived as a stylistic preference rather than rooted in identity and opposition as seen in *That's Not Me* (2014) because by 2021, Skepta had already cemented his status within both UK rap and luxury fashion circuits. His rejection of Amiri appears less as an act of subcultural defiance and more as a demonstration of refined personal taste and brand discernment, aligning with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction, where taste becomes a performance of embodied cultural capital. The lyrics function as a declaration of autonomy over his stylistic narrative, not a critique of mainstream fashion per se, but rather a marker of cultivated preference; asserting that he no longer needs to reject brands to assert his identity, but instead, exercises selective alignment based on his own established cultural authority. *Peace of Mind* (2021) serves as an example that once again negates the belief that all lyrical brand mentions are forms of brand or product placements (Ferguson and Burkhalter, 2015; Metcalfe and Ruth, 2020; Farwell *et al*., 2023), which I also discussed in Chapters Four and Five, with other lyrical examples. Contrary to his previous lyrics disregarding luxury brands, Skepta now portrays brands as aspirational and exclusive, either explicitly or through subtle wordplay: "Soon as you say, 'On sight,' we lookin' for you like some vintage Prada" (Skepta, *Gas Me Up*, 2024). His association with luxury depicts a genuine but complicated journey. His trajectory offers a distinctive case study in how a Black British rap artist has resisted the pursuit of external validation and the pressure to conform, instead carving out his own space within the luxury fashion sphere and emerging as a fashion icon on his own terms. Skepta's complex journey in the luxury fashion universe has illustrated that his integration was not an overnight success.

While Skepta's position in the UK music and fashion industries may be interpreted as an expression of patriarchal privilege, it is essential to situate this within the complexities of race, class and cultural capital (Crenshaw, 1991). Traditional notions of patriarchal privilege often centre on white, middle-class masculinity and its dominance across institutional and cultural domains (Connell, 2005).

However, Black working-class men have historically been marginalised within both music and fashion hierarchies (Nwonka, 2021), often occupying roles shaped by hypervisibility rather than institutional power (hooks, 2004). In this sense, Skepta's visibility and influence do not automatically equate to patriarchal dominance in the traditional sense. Instead, his form of privilege is situated within a specific cultural field in which he has accrued symbolic capital; respect, credibility and aesthetic authority, rooted in his authenticity, musical innovation and representation of Afro-diasporic identity.

Rather than inheriting institutional privilege, Skepta has arguably exercised navigational capital (Yosso, 2005): the ability to manoeuvre through social institutions not created for people of colour, as expanded on in Chapter Two. Through strategic collaborations with luxury brands and fashion magazines (which will be shown to the reader in the next section), ownership of his creative image (Quartey, 2023), and a refusal to dilute his cultural identity for mainstream appeal (*That's Not Me*, 2014), Skepta has carved out a space of power. His access to influential platforms such as Fashion Weeks (Mowatt *et al*., 2013; Thomas, 2020) and high-profile brand partnerships (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2021) is not simply a result of patriarchal positioning but a complex negotiation of Afro-diasporic masculinity, subcultural style and loyalty, as well as cultural entrepreneurship (Nketiah, 2020). Therefore, while Skepta may hold certain gendered advantages (Connell, 2005) that were highlighted in Chapter Five through Shaybo's insights, they must be understood as intersecting with, and often constrained by, the enduring barriers of racialisation and class-based exclusion within the industries he navigates (Gill, 2014; Namatovu, 2023).

7.3 From Outsider to Insider

Despite Skepta's intricate relationship with luxury brands, today, he is a fashion and style icon, as Ladoja concurs (See Appendix 2, 00:36:07). A rapper endowed with preeminent cultural influence and recognised as a style icon exerts a profound impact on fashion-related aspirations and decisions; their attire becomes cultural commentary (Entwistle, 2009) that is aspirational and trendy, consequently elevating the prominence of the brands they wear within UK rap culture. Rap artists such as Skepta influence and shape tastes and styles, not to reinforce social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1984); neither do they come from the dominant class that Bourdieu (ibid.) claimed sets trends. Taste serves not as a social weapon (ibid.) for rappers, but rather as an indicator of being trendy; exhibiting a nonconformist style that simultaneously attracts the attention of others (Mears, 2020); and being a fashion leader (Sproles, 1979). UK rap style icons such as Skepta can alter fashion tastes through their unique aesthetics and draw major attention in the fashion world (Varol, 2021). Ladoja states: "Skepta is a

style icon. … They look at him for style; they'll see what he's wearing. … he has that influence" (See Appendix 2, 00:36:22). We now see how a UK rap artist such as Skepta can contribute to shaping identities and the construction of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) affirmed through recognition of their style and dress. And when seen on an artist that has not allowed their identity to be overthrown, such as Skepta, their influence extends beyond mere trend incitement and their positioning within neoliberal schemes (Lipovetsky, 2002).

Skepta exemplifies navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) through his distinctive style, which is only attributable to his cultural influence. Drawing on the meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989), one can assert that Skepta, a style icon, embodies a significance that transcends mere aesthetic appeal. Rappers embody specific meanings or cultural attributes. A rapper may represent success (Ogbar, 2007), rebellion (Rose, 1994), or luxury (Mears, 2020) through what I conceptualise as their style icon identity. In Chapter Two, I presented an argument regarding how rap artists today serve as modern embodiments of the ways in which pre-colonial Africans engaged with luxury and dress, especially in relation to jewellery and accessories. Those characteristics can re-emerge in the style icon identities of rap artists, which have a solid foundation in the African cultural system (Asante, 1988); intricately woven with elements of heritage, class, double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; Gilroy, 1993), and other distinctive facets, all of which play a role in reinforcing the representation of the UK African diaspora within the realm of fashion. Although this thesis does not discuss the analysis of music videos, Skepta's heritage being embedded in his style icon identity serves as an example of how the African cultural system (Asante, 1988) has had an impact on his oppositional negotiations and evolution of dress and style. As seen in the *Warm* (K Trap feat. Skepta, 2023) music video, Skepta wears a traditional Igbo Ozo red hat, which symbolises authority, respect and chieftaincy (Chuks, 2018; Ikediugwu, 2019). Rather than wearing a Westernised luxury-branded hat or outfit, Skepta chose to wear his Ozo red hat in the Warm music video, making a cultural and decolonial statement through dress (Mercer, 1994). We must consider how a style icon such as Skepta, by wearing garments rooted in pride of heritage within productions that later become deeply embedded in popular culture (Watkins, 2005), promotes a decolonised consciousness (Oloruntoba, 2023). In doing so, he resists the schemes launched by colonialism; schemes that have functioned as psychological tactics (Bulhan, 2015) aimed at eradicating African cultures, beliefs and Indigenous traditions (Igboin, 2011). Equally, we must question how this process enables opportunities for decolonisation through his cultural influence, his representation of Black British identities in luxury fashion media (hooks, 1995), and his role in reconstructing brand image (Kawamura, 2005) because it challenges dominant narratives, repositions Black aesthetics as

aspirational rather than primarily oppositional (Mercer, 1994), and reclaims space within historically exclusive fashion institutions.

UK rappers such as Skepta can leverage their visibility and cultural influence to challenge traditional Eurocentric narratives (Ott and Diop, 2023) linked to luxury brands. Skepta (as illustrated in Chapter 5) has employed language (Thiong'o, 1986) and resisted Eurocentricity through his lyrics. As demonstrated earlier in this section, his resistance also manifests in the realm of fashion and dress (Craik, 1994; Eicher and Sumberg, 1995; Eicher, Evenson, and Lutz, 2000), exemplifying a cultural disengagement from Eurocentrism (Thiong'o, 1986). This case study example affirms the presence of a decolonised consciousness within UK rap, expressed through Skepta's pride in his heritage (Oloruntoba, 2023). Taking into account the discussions in Chapters Four and Five, Skepta's oppositional stance and dominant presence within the luxury fashion scene underline how resistant capital (Yosso, 2005), rooted in the African cultural system (Asante, 1988), generates expanded cultural currency through navigational, social, and via rap, linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). These dynamics prompt critical reflection on the paradox wherein such seemingly 'radical' contemporary representations of Blackness within a white-centric and rigid luxury fashion industry are subsequently leveraged as marketing assets; an issue Lash underscores below:

> Skepta, Lancey, Dave, Stormzy. These are African people, all West African, to be specific. … So, there's definitely a tie. There's definitely something that shines through. And then, of course, to … bring it to the high fashion side, they're the people they're calling and casting at their shoots (See Appendix, 1, 00:33:53)

Lash's comment underscores the instrumentalisation of African diasporic visibility within fashion media. The luxury fashion sector appropriates the symbolic power of African and Caribbean heritage to enhance its own relevance and market reach. This case study on Skepta illustrates how cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) becomes both a source of empowerment and a site of extraction. Skepta's deep immersion and prestige within the luxury fashion world, evident through brand campaigns, partnerships and personal relationships with designers, raise critical questions about how authenticity, heritage and resistant capital are not only represented but, in a way, repurposed to reinforce the very structures they once stood against. (hooks, 1992; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill and Orgad, 2018).

The luxury industry is increasingly associating with rappers and featuring them as the faces of their brands despite being stereotypically a conflicting match (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023) due to aspects related to the SAFE framework (Schmader and Sedikides, 2017) that I have explained earlier. I have demonstrated how Skepta has been unwavering in his authenticity; coolness and authenticity reside in the same sphere (Warren *et al*., 2019). Thus, Skepta's associations with luxury brands not only provide a brand with coolness (Pantin-Sohier *et al*., 2023) and street credibility (Miller, 2011) but also authenticity. His recognition and cultural value in the sector took time to be acknowledged, something that often accompanies the position of being a pioneer, as Ladoja also implies. However, Skepta's involvement in the fashion industry is not solely determined by his brand ties. He also owns a brand that has been showcased at London Fashion Week (Vogue, 2023), demonstrating Black ownership and exemplifying cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as a means of integrating into the luxury space in a way that nurtures, rather than depletes, Black cultural currency.

7.4 Owning the narrative: Calls for Black ownership

It is essential to emphasise that music, style and fashion serve as visual manifestations (Fleetwood, 2011) of the extensive impact of Black culture (Gilroy, 1993; Rose, 1994; Fleetwood, 2011), specifically hip-hop and rap, in the contemporary context (Rose, 1994; Dyson, 2007; Romero, 2012). Afro-diasporic rappers such as Skepta are therefore cultural influencers (Lena, 2012). Cultural influence refers to the effect that culture, encompassing its practices, has on the perceptions and behaviours of individuals who engage with or are part of it (Drew, 2023). Given the immense cultural demand and influence Black producers generate across various industries, why is there still such a stark absence of Black ownership within them?

Influencer culture has become a dominant mechanism through which cultural capital is mediated in digital economies, blurring the lines between celebrity, marketing, and peer-to-peer recommendation (Abidin, 2016; Khamis, Ang and Welling, 2017). As social media platforms increasingly determine visibility and value, influencers operate as "micro-celebrities" (Senft, 2008) who convert personal style, lifestyle, and identity into marketable narratives. This commodification of authenticity (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2016) has reconfigured how musicians like Skepta engage with brands, shifting from traditional endorsement models to reciprocal relationships in which cultural legitimacy flows both ways (Hou, 2019). In this sense, influencer culture is not merely promotional but structural, shaping the aesthetics, labour, and political economy of contemporary music–fashion intersections.

Skepta's appeal extends beyond solely Black audiences (Rose, 1994; Kitwana, 2005). In the context of Britain, the impact of UK rap is evident among various ethnic groups (Bramwell, 2011). Such influence illustrates the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora via rappers, and brings forward considerations of how global industries such as the luxury sector derive benefits from it. Rap artists such as Skepta wield significant cultural influence beyond their musical contributions (Wang, 2015). These same considerations underscore an urgent call for Black ownership grounded in Pan-African ethos (Mbembe, 2017; Adi, 2018; Oloruntoba, 2023), as a necessary antidote to the persistent exploitation of Black cultural currency; frequently used for marketing (Jackson, 2014), promotion (Carter, 2022) and cool-credibility (Banet-Weiser, 2012), yet rarely valued beyond these transactional functions (hooks, 1992; Ngangura, 2020).

To break free from modern-day shackles, one of the most effective ways for Black rap artists to apply their cultural influence and preserve the diaspora's cultural currency within the UK rap and luxury fashion intersection is through advocating for Black ownership; whether through securing ownership of their music rights (George, 1998; Ballantine, 2013) or founding and leading luxury fashion brands, as exemplified by Skepta— an imperative Ladoja highlights:

> And that's why I'm like that ownership; that ownership thing means something to me because it's like they're getting so much out of it. It's free advertisements and the knock-on effect like I wish it was promoting something that could be beneficial for generational wealth. (See Appendix 2, 01:02:11)

Ladoja's insights elucidate the principal arguments for the advancement of the Black community as articulated by Anderson (2000) in his seminal work, *PowerNomics: The National Plan to Empower Black America.* While primarily centred on African Americans, his principal arguments possess applicability to the progression of UK rap artists, especially regarding the interplay between rap and luxury, thereby promoting the generational wealth that Ladoja underscores. Anderson (2000) posits that economic self-sufficiency is essential for Black communities, advocating for the establishment and ownership of businesses that serve the Black community. This perspective highlights the necessity for Black ownership within the luxury fashion industry, aiming to level the playing field for UK rappers and to enhance the social advantages that Rose (2008) argues have been compromised by commercialism. Anderson's second key argument postulates that the creation of wealth and the control inherent in Black ownership of assets serve as the principal mechanism for establishing and

managing wealth, thereby ensuring that profits and decision-making processes are retained within the community. In reference to the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005), it is imperative to recognise that UK rap, as both a talent and a skill, emerges as a significant byproduct of the marginalisation experienced by Black British youth. This phenomenon should ideally translate into the creation of tangible wealth and the exercise of control, as elaborated upon by Anderson (2000). In this manner, this manifestation promotes group economics, wherein the cultural currency of UK rap contributes to economic growth through the support of Black-owned brands and, in turn, nurtures cultural wealth. This reciprocal exchange— of support and the nurturing of cultural wealth is exemplified in Skepta's 2024 London Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2025 show (*Hypebeast*, 2024), where members of the UK rap community were not only present but visibly endorsing his brand, Mains, by wearing it.

Black ownership represents the paramount pathway to decolonisation, as it confronts the neoliberalist capitalism that exacerbates economic and social inequalities (Harvey, 2005). Black ownership alters the power dynamics at the junction of luxury and rap; UK rappers remain excluded from the advantages of this relationship despite their tremendous cultural impact. Luxury companies leverage this dynamic, highlighting the necessity for decolonial methods (Fanon, 1963; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015) to safeguard Afrodiasporic cultural currencies, countering the pitfalls and 'comforts' of capitalism (Brand, 2021). Lash states the following regarding Black ownership, using Skepta's 2024 film as an example:

> For example, the tribal mark film that we shot … 90% cast and crew, 90% Black or ethnic origin … because we can control it. It's us doing it … The minute you get a sponsor in it or one of these firms, they're gonna do it their way. (See Appendix 1, 00:24:07)

Lash's point underscores how Black ownership can serve as a crucial pathway for economic opportunity among Black and ethnic minority communities precisely because it safeguards creative control, allowing for self-determined narratives, casting, and production processes that resist external dilution or co-option (Smith, 2017; hooks, 1992). His statement highlights that as soon as external 'entities' are involved, the control is withdrawn (hooks, 1992; Gilroy, 2004). It is also worth noting that Skepta's *Tribal Mark* (2024) film, which Lash discusses, depicts a Nigerian immigrant who evolves into a secret service agent, who *Vogue* (Phillip, 2024) and *Paper Magazine* (2024) have described as a Black James Bond. Here, we see how Black ownership can foster decolonisation through visuals (Hall, 1997).

One must wonder how such a film impacts the young Black mind. Thus, with consideration of how the luxury fashion sector exploits rap artists (Miller, 2011), we must ask ourselves: what good is it to 'decolonise' through imagery representing Black people within the sector if, behind the scenes, there is a lack of control and the black rapper is only there to amplify and promote consumption, and not truly be a beneficiary of the partnership? Indeed, the rap artist may be paid, but just like the sonic power of lyrics, the rapper gives the brand an invaluable boost in brand relevance and meaning (McCracken, 1989).

Skepta exemplifies how culture functions as a form of capital, specifically for Black Britain, within the intersecting realms of UK rap and luxury fashion. His trajectory highlights how cultural output, drawn from Afro-diasporic experiences and expressed through music (Gilroy, 1993; Rose, 1994), fashion (Entwistle, 2009) and public image (Mears, 2011), becomes a powerful source of value. As a cultural producer who has consciously curated his affiliations and presence in fashion spaces, Skepta embodies a form of cultural stewardship that resists exploitation (hooks, 1992). His ability to control the terms of his cultural contributions reflects a deeper awareness of how brands commodify Black creativity while often excluding Black ownership. Rather than being absorbed into existing fashion hierarchies, Skepta has leveraged his influence to author new pathways into luxury spaces, on his own terms. One powerful example of this is captured by Ladoja, who reflects on a moment that signals Skepta's calculated and self-defined entry into the luxury fashion conversation:

> You can get positioned in fashion and luxury through different ways. Like, you know, he did that cover shoot with GQ with Naomi Campbell for his own brand, Mains. That speaks to him being in a luxury space now. (See Appendix 2, 00:58:48).

Ladoja's statement highlights the significance of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) in Skepta's positioning in the luxury industry: establishing a Black-owned brand, having his brand supported by Naomi Campbell, a renowned Black supermodel who has represented various luxury brands (Mercer, 2017). Her being on the front cover of a respected fashion publication without a prominent and expected luxury brand logo in sight, but instead a visual product placement of Skepta's Mains branded boxers, shatters 'glass ceilings'. The GQ cover mentioned by Ladoja is an example of how a picture is worth a thousand words. It illustrates Black British cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), a contemporary representation of the UK African diaspora and how a UK rap artist can attain successful integration in the world of fashion, which is corroborated in Skepta's song featuring Lancey Foux, *Animal Instinct* (2019) where he raps: "Front page in my boxers for the culture." His lyrics not only reference the GQ

cover directly, but also affirm Skepta's intentionality in using his body, brand and platform as instruments of cultural assertion and visibility (hooks, 1992) within luxury fashion; explicitly framing the act as being "for the culture," and by extension, for the people he represents.

Culture is Black Britain's greatest currency, and Skepta seems to be one of contemporary Black Britain's most prolific stewards. UK rap epitomises that currency today, with artists like Skepta translating its value into global cultural capital. Luxury brands continue to capitalise on a currency that does not belong to them (Mercer, 1994; Holt, 2004; Miller, 2011; Mukherjee, 2019). "We are very … strict about things like … brand affiliation, what we put around us, and that's because … culture is our currency" (See Appendix 1, 00:36:27). Lash's statement comes full circle, epitomising how all the components of this thesis intertwine: culture does not only carry connotations of pedigree; it is wealth; it is the basis of cultivation in resources; it is the tool of harnessing economic and social advancement (Yosso, 2005) for young Black Britain. Within the scope of this study, the power of cultural currency as a vehicle for economic and social advancement is most clearly evidenced through the relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion brands. In Skepta's case, this cultural currency is not only protected; it is reinvested, redefined and reclaimed.

7.5 Behind the look: the stylist, UK rap, and luxury fashion in the case of Skepta

In styling Skepta, the use of luxury fashion becomes a tool to visualise and articulate Afro-diasporic negotiations through dress (Tulloch, 2010). The stylist can use luxury brands and products to exert and semiotically induce the duality of being Black and British, curating an image that exemplifies double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; Gilroy, 1993). Vernon offers a concrete example: "For example, if he wears Burberry, he wants to evoke a sense of British heritage" (See Appendix 3, 00:06:16). The stylist can use luxury brands with histories and aesthetics to connote aspects of the rapper's identity; a British brand, such as Burberry (Weston, 2016), being worn by a Black British rap artist exudes a semiotic indication of the dualism in being Black and British.

Diaspora fashion operates with values distinct from mainstream fashion (Lewis, 2003, p. 179). For Skepta, whose image merges British and Nigerian identities, this duality must be reflected in how he is styled; especially when working with Eurocentric luxury brands. The stylist's task is to preserve authenticity by integrating cultural elements that align with the artist's heritage (Peterson, 2005). As Vernon notes: "So I think … definitely communicate … the heritage of the person is important … it's

about their narrative and their story" (See Appendix 3, 00:29:59). Though a full semiotic analysis lies beyond this thesis, clothing in rap functions as nonverbal communication (Brown, 2006; Danesi, 2006). In Skepta's case, luxury fashion becomes a medium for expressing cultural identity and negotiating double consciousness.

Aside from ethnicity, the stylist must study UK rap subcultural dress when dressing rappers. In Skepta's case, the fusion of luxury and streetwear is both stylistic and ideological. His previous long-standing collaboration with Nike (*British GQ Magazine*, 2021); an emblem of London street culture and UK rap style narratives (Parker, 2022; Rahman, 2016), reflects how deeply rooted his fashion identity is in the streets that shaped him. These collaborations preserve the aesthetics of UK rap's subcultural dress while legitimising it within global fashion circuits. Likewise, his more recent partnership with Puma continues this interplay, bridging high fashion, streetwear and Black British cultural expression. More broadly, UK rap is the product of urban environments (Bramwell, 2015), and its fashion identity reflects that. Stylists working with rappers like Skepta must account for clothing's deeper societal meaning (Owyong, 2009), preserving the working-class sensibilities and subcultural codes (Romero, 2012; Parker, 2022). When luxury is layered with streetwear, it challenges dominant class perceptions and retains the 'edge' essential to UK rap's style identity. Vernon states the following:

> The fusion of streetwear brands and luxury fashion in the UK is a statement to the generous versatility … I think it really shows how versatile the artists can be … it blurs the traditional boundaries … allowing for like more unique and authentic expression of the artist … And I feel like it just resonates with a more diverse … rap music scene. (See Appendix 3, 00:33:58)

Skepta's trajectory exemplifies how a rapper can disrupt traditional constructs of clothing and class (Crane, 2000) through fashion. His stylist, Vernon, plays a pivotal role in curating looks that honour Skepta's working-class roots while incorporating luxury fashion in ways that feel authentic rather than assimilative (Dhaenens and De Zutter, 2017). A stylist's clothing selection, particularly in Skepta's case, can blur and even subvert class boundaries (Crane, 2000; Entwistle, 2000), amplifying rather than concealing the artist's social origins. I interpret the blurring of traditional boundaries that Vernon refers to as a reflection of how the contemporary fashion world and UK rap scene are actively challenging outdated sartorial hierarchies outlined by theorists like Veblen (1899) and Simmel (1904). The elite cannot easily distinguish themselves and dominate lower socio-economic groups through dress (Manlow, 2009, p.5) if stylists use clothing to distort traditional boundaries, which are then

permeated via popular culture avenues. The distortion of traditional boundaries that Vernon refers to can be done through the mixing of luxury, sportswear and streetwear. The historical function of fashion as a tool of elite distinction has long been theorised by sociologists such as Simmel (1904) and Bourdieu (1984), who argued that the upper classes use dress and taste to differentiate themselves from lower socio-economic groups. However, in the contemporary cultural economy, the efficacy of dress as a stable marker of class has significantly eroded (Entwistle, 2000; Skeggs, 2004). This erosion is attributed to the democratisation of fashion via fast fashion, digital culture, and the diffusion of elite aesthetics through celebrity and influencer circuits (Manlow, 2009; Crane, 2012). Manlow (2009, p.5) argues that the symbolic capital once embedded in elite dress has become increasingly accessible and imitable, undermining its exclusivity. Similarly, Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) observe that the fashion system's porous boundaries, accelerated by global media, have allowed streetwear and luxury to intermingle, rendering class boundaries in dress more ambiguous than in previous eras.

The concepts of "subcultural capital" (Thornton, 1995) and "cultural omnivorousness" (Peterson and Kern, 1996) highlight how contemporary elites signal status by mixing high fashion with subcultural style. But artists like Skepta, who emerge from working-class Black British communities, invert this logic. His fusion of Nike streetwear and luxury fashion reclaims the aesthetics of prestige from the margins. Rather than imitate elite consumption (Hebdige, 1979), Skepta's style asserts cultural ownership, blending everyday and high-end fashion in ways that challenge traditional hierarchies. In doing so, he exemplifies how UK rap artists use fashion to destabilise elite distinction and recode sartorial value from the ground up (McRobbie, 1998; Eshun, 2003). As McRobbie (1998) and Eshun (2003) suggest, Black British youth often appropriate and transform dominant aesthetic codes in ways that assert identity and visibility, thereby unsettling the semiotic authority of elite dress. In this sense, the inability of elites to clearly distinguish themselves through dress is not merely a symptom of capitalist consumption cycles (Bourdieu, 1984) but also a reflection of the cultural agency and innovation of marginalised groups (Yosso, 2005). Within this context, the earlier claim that elites cannot clearly distinguish themselves through dress is not only supportable but essential to understanding how clothing, as a symbolic medium, is continuously contested and reshaped within the fashion and rap music nexus. Historically, the elite dictated taste and emulation (Crane, 2000, p. 166); rappers like Skepta have unsettled that model.

Despite his alignment with subcultural dress and a refusal to fully conform to mainstream fashion codes, Skepta has embraced luxury brands both lyrically and aesthetically, on his own terms. His

fashion choices, even when styled by Vernon, reflect a deliberate negotiation of image and authenticity:

> When styling, for example, Skepta, the relevance and importance of luxury brands can be seen in many ways … first of all, they provide statements for Skepta's image … But also it happens when he wears streetwear (Appendix 3, 00:05:51).

There is little doubt that luxury fashion confers cachet, status and the visual codes of aspirational lifestyles upon the rap persona (Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012). Vernon expands on this logic: "Brands carry prestige and exclusivity and when an artist wears the brands … it communicates success, sophistication and a connection to a certain lifestyle" (Appendix 3, 00:07:12). However, the stylist's labour in shaping Skepta's image goes beyond wardrobe selection. For Black UK rappers like Skepta, the adoption of luxury fashion can perform both symbolic resistance and aspirational affirmation. Vernon's understanding as a stylist reflects this duality: the wearing of luxury brands can simultaneously challenge and conform to dominant values. It is precisely within this contradiction that resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) and oppositional behaviour (Mikkonen *et al*., 2013) are performed through the tension between high fashion aesthetics and the refusal to be confined by normative assumptions about how Black men should look.

The stylist, then, becomes a critical architect of meaning, layering clothing with signifiers of authenticity, ethnicity, subcultural distinction and gendered nuance. When fused effectively, these elements produce a visual language (Lynge-Jorlén, 2020) that amplifies the artist's identity, rather than allowing it to be subsumed by the often-assimilative forces of luxury fashion (Crane, 2012). In styling Skepta, Vernon's incorporation of streetwear elements and culturally specific references marks a visual 'resistance' that is deeply entwined with cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). The stylist's work is, fundamentally, a form of storytelling (Lewis, 2003; Lynge-Jorlén, 2020). Vernon affirms this narrative function: "I definitely aim to tell stories" (Appendix 3, 00:37:16). In the context of luxury fashion, storytelling is not merely an aesthetic embellishment; it is an essential market activity (Lund *et al*., 2020), one that enables brands to communicate values and foster emotional resonance with audiences (Burns *et al*., 2020; Guan *et al*., 2023). But for stylists working within UK rap, storytelling assumes an additional political and cultural imperative: it enables the construction of imagery that reflects and empowers diasporic Black identities. As Vernon puts it:

> … I think it's … always important to take certain elements and … put them in … to give even more importance to what you're trying to say … that is just culturally relevant for us as Black people (Appendix 3, 00:30:51).

Visual storytelling thus becomes a vehicle for embedding aspirational and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) into the artist's image. This process not only contributes to the rapper's cultural currency but also participates in broader decolonial practices (Davids, 2024). Through an intentional curation of fashion, stylists can challenge colonial legacies embedded in dominant visual representations; what Bisht (2017) calls a "decolonisation of cultural foresight." In the same way that literary texts can cultivate new futures (Schwarz, 2015), stylists can generate counter-narratives through fashion that reject colonial impositions on Black futurity (Bourgeois *et al*., 2022). Importantly, stylists also draw on the linguistic capital embedded in the artist's music. UK rap lyrics become rich resources for storytelling through fashion. Vernon notes the centrality of lyrics in her creative process with Skepta: "… some of the references might come from … his lyrics … it's … important to add layers of depth to whatever we do in style" (Appendix 3, 00:33:16). Styling becomes a subcultural practice in its own right; one that challenges dominant ideologies through symbolic resistance (Hebdige, 1979). By incorporating lyrical references into visual storytelling, the stylist mobilises resistant and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005), creating a layered visual lexicon that mirrors the narrative complexity of the music itself. The stylist is no longer merely a mediator between designer and client (Lynge-Jorlén, 2020); rather, they become 'co-authors' or enhancers of UK rap's linguistic capital, translated into and through dress.

To engage in this kind of deep narrative work, however, the stylist must immerse themselves fully in the artist's world. This requires rapport: an emotional and professional connection that facilitates genuine collaboration (Hill and Stephens, 1997). While lyrics can provide an interpretive framework for styling, building trust and rapport with the rapper is foundational to curating authentic representation. Vernon reflects on the importance of attentive listening and personal engagement in her work with Skepta:

> I think what's really important is like listening. The best thing is getting to know the person that you're styling … I like getting to know the person and then knowing the things that they like, you need to really like get submerged in their world … you have to really pay attention to their lyrics, to the things they say … I write it down … I already knew … there's a few

> brands that Skepta likes working with … I definitely pay attention to see what I can see in his lyrics or anywhere you know. (Appendix 3, 00:25:38)

Stylists often develop close, long-term relationships with artists (Lynge-Jorlén, 2020). By understanding the artist's preferences and cultural background, they recommend clothing that enhances identity and maintains authenticity. As Vernon, who styled Skepta, puts it: "It's like essentially being a collaborator in their artistic journey" (Appendix 3, 00:03:18). In Skepta's case, the stylist is part of a wider creative team: photographers, directors, visual producers (Lynge-Jorlén, 2020); co-authoring his visual language. This reflects the collaborative model discussed by Lifter (2020), where authenticity is shaped collectively rather than dictated by marketers. It challenges Negus's (1992) view that authenticity is manufactured, showing instead that in UK rap, and for Skepta specifically, authenticity is embodied and cultivated through creative rapport, concerning the stylist. Vernon emphasises the emotional labour required in this process:

> One thing that is important for me is building a relationship with the artist and delving into the unique identity and understanding … their story and what they want to tell to the people … Learning about their preferences and understanding what makes them feel confident and also identifying their limits of their personality that they want to shine through in their image (Appendix 3, 00:02:45).

Skepta, like many UK rap artists, stands apart from the mainstream pop figures critiqued by Negus (1992). His authenticity is not manufactured through marketing ideals, but is embedded in his lyricism, aesthetics and cultural positioning. If rap is autobiographical storytelling, then Skepta's styling becomes a visual extension of that narrative; rooted in his lived experience, identity and self-articulation. As Tulloch (2010) reminds us, style is a "telling of self," and in Skepta's case, that telling is co-authored through the informed and intentional interventions of his stylist.

7.6 Navigating neoliberalism: The case of Skepta

To fully understand Skepta's evolving relationship with luxury fashion, it is necessary to frame his aesthetic choices within the wider context of neoliberal cultural production (Harvey, 2007), because his stylistic shifts are not just personal or artistic decisions, but responses to the market pressures (Gill and Pratt, 2008), racialised expectations (Ferguson, 2004) and commodification of identity that shape

creative labour today (McRobbie, 2016). The convergence of UK rap and luxury fashion does not exist outside the reach of neoliberalism; it is, rather, emblematic of it. Authenticity and self-fashioning can't be separated from neoliberalism when rappers work in a market that turns identity, trauma and racial struggle into products (Gilroy, 2010). Take Skepta's evolution as a case in point. While early in his career he rejected high fashion brands, choosing to foreground streetwear and culturally resonant style codes, his eventual alignment with brands like Diesel (Condé Nast, 2021) was not a break from resistance, but a reconfiguration of it. This shift does not place him outside neoliberalism, but rather positions him within it as a skilled navigator. As Gilroy (2010) and Tyler (2020) argue, neoliberal subjects are not liberated agents, but responsibilised individuals made to convert cultural capital into market capital, often through self-commodification. Skepta's capacity to negotiate with luxury on his own terms illustrates navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), not as an escape from neoliberalism, but a strategic movement through it. His actions represent a form of cultural agility, not opposition to the market, but a way of leveraging its structures without succumbing entirely to their terms.

To claim, therefore, that UK rappers are 'victims' or 'pawns' of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007) risks flattening the complex interplay between coercion and agency (McRobbie, 2016). Neoliberalism is not an external force imposed upon Black artists; it is a racialised (Baldwin, 2016), ideological and economic system that they must inhabit, perform within and survive (Ferguson, 2004). As Hall (2011) argues, neoliberalism functions most powerfully not through domination but through consent, and by embedding its logic in the very language of freedom and entrepreneurship. The decision to collaborate with luxury fashion brands, or to reject them, does not signify pure resistance or submission; it reflects the limited and contradictory range of strategies available to marginalised creatives operating in a racialised market economy (Gill, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2018).

What is at stake in Skepta's embrace of luxury fashion is not a question of 'selling out' (Hesmondhalgh, 2005), but of how authenticity, resistance and cultural value are strategically negotiated within an economy that demands visibility as proof of worth (Bourdieu, 1984; Entwistle, 2009). Gilroy's (2010) critique of neoliberal multiculturalism is instructive here: the aesthetics of inclusion — Black models, diverse rappers, diasporic style — often obscure ongoing structural and economic exclusion. When Skepta fronts a luxury campaign, the gesture carries both cultural power and political tension. It affirms his cultural capital and global influence, yet also reminds us that such capital must be translated into economic value to be legible within the market (Bourdieu, 1984). Skepta, like many UK rappers, should not be viewed as standing outside neoliberalism, but rather as a cultural actor navigating its contradictions (Hall, 2011; McRobbie, 2016). His styling decisions and brand affiliations

reflect resistant, aspirational and navigational capital; not necessarily in rejection of the system, but as a tactical mode of survival within it (Yosso, 2005). In this light, Skepta's fashion trajectory exemplifies the entangled realities of race, class and commerce in 21st-century Britain (Gilroy, 1993; Mercer, 1994). His self-branding does not represent passive consumption, but a contested authorship; an insurgent form of neoliberal navigation that exposes and exploits the very structures that seek to commodify him.

Conclusion

Skepta's trajectory reveals that to understand UK rap's relationship with luxury fashion, we must move beyond simplistic binaries of resistance versus co-option. While shaped by systems of commodification, Skepta's stylistic choices also challenge dominant fashion constructs and assert cultural value rooted in Afro-diasporic knowledge and working-class creativity. This chapter has shown how Skepta exemplifies the mobilisation of resistant, aspirational and navigational capital in response to neoliberal conditions that commodify race and black creativity within an exclusionary industry. His role in creating a new kind of visibility, one that is strategic, political and self-defined, shows how Black British artists can work both within and against the systems that assign cultural and economic value. Skepta's case study shows how UK rap artists can navigate the racialised pressures of luxury fashion through forms of aspirational, resistant and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), rather than escaping neoliberalism altogether. This chapter has not only deepened our understanding of Skepta's position within the UK rap and luxury fashion brand terrain but has also illuminated the stylist's crucial role in mediating authenticity, visibility and facets of identity; addressing both the research objective of establishing a case study on Skepta's relationship with luxury fashion brands and the research question concerning the stylist's role in the UK rap-fashion nexus. The final chapter brings the thesis to a close by revisiting its central themes and outlining the contributions it makes to understanding the relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In the era of easily accessible streaming platforms, the synergetic relationship between rap music and luxury fashion brands is not only lyrically undeniable but is also inescapable. However, while considerable scholarly attention has been directed towards the commercial implications and assumptions of the stated relationship evident in lyrical content, this thesis set out to investigate the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, with a focus on the UK African diaspora youth cultural currency. This approach seeks to diverge from the industry politics and shallow-ended aspects of identity that have been the focus of prior research, particularly within the American context, encompassing ostentation and conspicuous consumption as the leading narratives. This thesis has elucidated the distinct relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, highlighting notable differences when compared to its US equivalent in Chapter Five, which are fundamentally anchored in subcultural dress variations and responses to mainstream values and ostentation. It has been demonstrated that the cultural currency of the UK Afro-diasporic Millennial and Gen Z community, specifically within the realm of UK rap, encompasses diverse manifestations of cultural wealth, from which luxury fashion brands derive certain advantages. Instead of presuming that rap exists as a singular entity, this thesis acknowledges UK rap as a significant source of contribution to Black epistemology. It emphasises the identities of UK rap artists and the contemporary UK African diaspora youth while incorporating the insights, experiences and perspectives of key industry professionals. Additionally, it undertakes an in-depth content analysis of UK rap songs released between 2014 and 2024.

This thesis begins with the premise that there exists a significant gap in our understanding of the intersection between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, especially in relation to the cultural wealth of the UK African diaspora. The intent is to foster a connection for diaspora members within contemporary academic literature while also enhancing the discourse surrounding the relationship between rap and fashion in scholarly work. The first aim of this thesis was to examine the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay and highlight how UK rap is a Black British cultural currency from which the luxury fashion sector benefits. In order to deem UK rap as a cultural currency, this thesis needed to assert what comprises the said cultural currency through an appropriated framework, the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005). By doing so, this thesis accomplished its second aim,

which was to contribute knowledge regarding the UK African diaspora's cultural wealth through UK rap. Operating from a Pan-Africanist standpoint, the third aim was to emphasise examples of decolonisation through UK rap as a Black cultural resource grounded in pride in heritage.

Similarly, to recap, the first objective was to develop a case study examining Skepta's ties with luxury fashion brands and obtain a female UK rapper perspective from Shaybo, both through semi-structured interviews and lyrics. The second objective was to conduct a thorough analysis of lyrics that incorporate luxury brand names, with the aim of investigating the contexts in which these brands are mentioned and underpinning assertions of ethnic heritage. Lastly, the third objective was to explore how a UK rap artist's identity and authenticity coincide with luxury brand associations.

This thesis employs a constructivist approach in its data analysis, offering original contributions and a novel epistemological system for understanding the interplay between rap music and luxury fashion brands. The initial three sections of this concluding chapter are devoted to addressing each research question. This was accomplished through the execution of semi-structured interviews with Shaybo, Ibrahim Kamara, Grace Ladoja, Nicole Vernon, and Lash, alongside an exhaustive examination of lyrical content. Both methods elucidated the complex interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands, which will be further synthesised in the subsequent sections. After these three sections, I delineate the key original contributions of the thesis to knowledge, followed by an examination of the limitations and recommendations of future research and, thereafter, a discussion of the implications of the research findings regarding theory, practice and policy. I then conclude with a final reflection and closing remarks where I emphasise the significance and vitality of Black epistemology as a decolonial instrument, particularly in relation to contemporary topics that resonate with Afro-diasporic, African and Caribbean youth, fostering cultural understanding and enabling them to recognise their own identities within the realm of scholarship.

8.2 Research question one: How far do UK rap artists and related industry professionals perceive the cultural influence that Black UK rappers may have on rap audiences through lyrical brand mentions and fashion identity?

Initially, I found myself contemplating the cultural influence of UK rap artists, drawing parallels with the US context. However, I came to recognise that my perspective was primarily shaped by my experiences as a consumer of rap music. In exploring the implications of this phenomenon on

consumers, one might argue that it presents a valuable avenue of inquiry. While I cannot truly establish the influence that rap artists hold for audiences without conducting a study on consumers, I contend that a distinct and equally significant contribution to the body of knowledge can be achieved by examining the perspectives of UK rap artists and associated industry professionals regarding the cultural influence that UK rappers exert. This approach is particularly pertinent, as these individuals are likely to possess a deeper understanding of the metrics involved and are directly engaged with the influence UK rappers wield within rap audiences. Their cultural influence encompasses the concept of cultural currency, which this thesis has examined through an analysis of the six forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Ladoja discussed the cultural influence that Skepta has exerted on emerging rap artists in Chapter Seven, whom I also acknowledge to be rap audiences. His oppositional and nonchalant stance when mentioning Gucci and Louis Vuitton in *That's Not Me* (2014) initiated a ripple effect, influencing younger generations to revert to the tracksuit, particularly at a time when UK rap artists found themselves excluded from the luxury brand landscape. Skepta's case study and Ladoja's insights revealed the intricate interplay of cultural factors in the discourse surrounding luxury brand mentions, which, contingent upon contextual variables, can concurrently shape the perceptions of younger audiences while enhancing the articulation of UK rap's subcultural fashion identity. The fundamental nature of freedom as expressed within the style narratives of the UK African diaspora, as noted by Tulloch (2010), reveals the ways in which UK rap artists' cultural influence, whether intentionally or unintentionally, contributes to the emancipation of mainstream values in seeking validation in the luxury sphere.

My research revealed the ways through which the cultural influence of UK rap artists is cultivated via the relatability of fashion identity, with the tracksuit serving as a pivotal connection between UK rappers and their audiences, as discussed in Chapter Five. The tracksuit does not represent delinquency or deviance (Rahman, 2016; Parker, 2022), as scholars suggest, but rather signifies unity and the dissolution of boundaries between rap celebrity and fan. Shaybo emphasised that her choice to wear a tracksuit elicits a warmer response from her fans, suggesting that a resonance with working-class experiences and subcultural identity overshadows the glass wall and superficiality inherent in celebrity culture (Turner, 2014). This underscores the significance of the tracksuit within the narratives of UK rap style. Shaybo emphasises that, notwithstanding the status as a renowned rapper with access to luxury brands and opulence, the tracksuit remains an ensemble that maintains the rapper's

connection to their demographic and will perpetually be a crucial element of UK rap, despite its clear interaction with luxury fashion brands.

The trajectory of cultural influence exerted by UK rap artists, particularly in the context of employing resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) against luxury brands, as evidenced in *That's Not Me* by Skepta (2014) and *I'm Coming* by J Hus (2015) for example, transitions towards the utilisation of luxury brands to cultivate and reinforce aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) in later songs. Ladoja affirms the presence of aspirational capital within the cultural influence of UK rappers in Chapter Five, where she illustrates their impact on giving cultural relevance to Van Cleef Arpels through lyrics. She shares that UK rap music has notably shaped the preferences and aspirations of Gen Z audiences, reflecting the broader cultural influence of UK rap artists on luxury brand preferences and fashion trends. In Chapter Five, Shaybo emphasised that the recognition of UK rappers as influential figures extends beyond UK rap audiences, encompassing luxury brands as well. It is evident that luxury brands, predominantly owned by White individuals and established over several decades, sustain their relevance among the youth largely due to the influence exerted by UK rap artists and the thematic content of their music. The cultural currency of UK rap is intricately woven into the 'fabric' of aspirational capital.

An additional consideration of the cultural influence generated by UK rappers pertains to their status as style icons. Once more, considering the instance of Skepta being identified as a style icon by Ladoja in Chapter Seven, he has undergone a transformation from his '*That's Not Me'* era and assimilated into the luxury fashion realm on his own terms, effecting navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), thereby establishing social capital via personal connections with prominent luxury brand designers and creative directors, including Virgil Abloh, Daniel Lee and Matthew Williams, as Lash shared in Chapter Five, while also serving as the face of brands such as Burberry, in addition to launching his own fashion brand, as discussed in Chapter Five and Seven. It is evident that a rapper must be somewhat integrated into the luxury sector to attain the status of a style icon, thereby establishing themselves as a credible 'tastemaker' and being recognised as a fashion leader (Sproles, 1979) rather than merely conforming; that is how a rapper's cultural influence within the fashion domain is solidified. While rappers can shape aspirations through their verbal expressions, it is primarily rap style icons who possess the capacity to impact fashion choices and buying decisions.

In synthesising and concluding the questioning regarding the extent to which UK rap artists and associated industry professionals perceive the cultural influence that Black UK rappers may have on rap audiences through lyrical brand mentions and fashion identity, it is evident that UK rap artists are

indeed culturally influential through their lyrical brand mentions, as seen in Chapters Five and Six. Their adherence to and preservation of UK rap fashion identity, exemplified by the tracksuit, is also evident in Chapters Five and Six. Through their noteworthy cultural influence, UK rap artists play a vital role in shaping the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora, specifically anchored in aspirational capital, navigational capital and resistant capital.

8.3 Research question two: What is the role of the stylist in the UK rap and fashion relationship?

My decision to temporarily halt my styling work was influenced not solely by my academic ambitions, but also by a perception that the role of a stylist was excessively constrained. It seemed to lack the autonomy necessary to convey significant messages through attire, reducing the practice to merely utilising the latest trends and ensuring the inclusion of specific brands within the visual narrative. While I acknowledge that this is not the case with every stylist, it was refreshing to uncover that the essence of the rap artist's identity precedes the superficial elements of clothing, branding, or commercial interests when interviewing Vernon.

While rap artists undoubtedly function as brands, it is essential to recognise that authenticity serves as a fundamental element of rap music (Rose, 1994); consequently, the stylist must enhance the rapper's identity. In Chapter Five, Vernon established that, to maintain the rapper's identity, the stylist's function is to meticulously curate an image through clothing that is congruent with who the rap artist is. Kamara articulated that, even within the realm of magazine work, stylists actively amplify the identities of rap artists. In this context, it is evident that the stylist must take into account not only the economic factors as posited by Lynge-Jorlén (2016) when working with a magazine on fashion editorials but also the considerations that Kamara points out. The role of stylists in the relationship between UK rap and luxury brands is significant, as they are able to employ clothing in a semiotic manner that advances rappers' identities. In the role of a translator, stylists have the capacity to enhance the authenticity linked to UK rap by embodying the role of a storyteller, as seen in Chapter Five. This involves careful consideration of essential elements such as heritage and class, as well as an awareness of psychological dimensions to prevent the alienation of the rapper from their own identity. Furthermore, it is crucial to amplify aspects that genuinely reflect the artist's true self because of how luxury fashion attire has the potential to obscure the fundamental nature of an individual's identity (Hall, 1996). The act of suppressing the identity of a Black rapper, even through the medium of clothing, serves to underscore the significance of the neoliberalism that is entrenched within the

music industry, which is fundamentally aligned with an exploitative, racist and neo-colonial agenda. Consequently, in contributing to the scholarly discussion surrounding the stylist, it is evident that, in addition to serving as cultural intermediaries between designers and consumers, as stated by Lynge-Jorlén (2016; 2020), they also function as cultural guardians through their role in preserving and enhancing the identities of UK rap artists. This perspective prompts an opportunity to examine the ways in which industry personnel, as discussed by Negus (1992), may contribute to the decolonisation of media representations concerning Black rap artists.

Establishing rapport invigorates the interaction and provides the stylist with a valuable opportunity to glean insights into the rap artist's preferences, interests, background and favoured brands. Vernon emphasised the crucial role of establishing a rapport between the stylist and the artist. In the context of an artist such as Skepta, who vividly embodies pride in his ethnic heritage in Chapters Five and Six, it is imperative for the stylist to acknowledge these elements and consider how they might be integrated into the process of sartorial curation. I argue that African diaspora fashion (Lewis, 2003), emerges from the African cultural system (Asante, 1988) and adaptation to living in the West. This fashion embodies a sense of empowerment within its style narratives (Tulloch, 2010). It is imperative for stylists collaborating with UK rap artists to take these elements into account. Such consideration not only serves to illustrate authenticity in identity but also plays a crucial role in the cultivation and representation of the Afro-diasporic cultural currency through clothing in imagery, music videos, and magazines. This line of thinking is a contemporary approach to the process of decolonising both thought and media.

An alternative approach for the stylist in determining how they will dress the rap artist involves careful evaluation of the artist's lyrical content, as Vernon stated in Chapter Seven. Rap artists such as Skepta present their songs as the most authentic reflections of their identities. UK rap artists have enough cultural wealth and knowledge to negotiate fashion for themselves, as seen in how they refer to fashion and brands in their lyrics in Chapters Five and Six. The stylist, therefore, cannot truly dress the rap artist in alignment with their identity merely by enquiring about their favourite colour or brand. Supposing a rap artist expresses a disfavour for Gucci within their lyrics, it presents a valuable opportunity for stylists to refrain from procuring garments that would contradict the sentiments conveyed in the artist's song. In a manner akin to Vernon’s observations, surveying lyrics presents a chance for the stylist to gain deeper insights into the preferences of the rap artist and who they are. The stylist can therefore utilise the artist's lyrics as references to construct sartorial meanings, which the rap audiences may subsequently recognise and appreciate.

Lastly, certain songs within the content analysis final sample exhibited anti-stylist statements. Such songs indicate that the role of the stylist may not be regarded with the same level of importance or esteem by certain rap artists as it is by others. I contend that this occurrence can be attributed to rap artists possessing a sufficient understanding of fashion brands and trends, rendering the employment of a stylist unnecessary. They take considerable pride in curating their own 'looks' and, arguably, are capable of expressing their identity more effectively than any stylist could achieve. The lyrics by Knucks and Fimiguerrero (*Nkita*, 2024), as discussed in Chapter Six, suggest that they possess the capability to dress themselves, thereby negating the necessity for a stylist. The second effect of the anti-stylist stance is observed among rap artists who exhibit a disregard for luxury fashion and prevailing trends, such as Jme. Their identities are deeply rooted in the subcultural anti-fashion views seen in the loyalty to the tracksuit within UK rap. In this case, their anti-stylist views serve as a form of discontent against mainstream values. This stance stands in contrast to the stylist, whose profession is intrinsically linked to these very values, especially concerning luxury fashion brands.

In conclusion, the function of the stylist within the interplay of UK rap and luxury fashion brands transcends mere body styling; rather, it serves to enhance the identity of rap artists through the medium of clothing. The stylist functions as both a storyteller and a translator, employing clothing as a medium of communication, with the rapper's identity serving as the essence of that dialogue.

8.4 Research question three: Are all UK rap lyrical mentions of luxury brand names forms of product and brand placement?

Throughout my research journey, as I explained my research topic to people and stated that I was analysing the content within rap songs in relation to luxury brand name-drops, the initial response I often encountered was, “Oh, product placement!”. In contrast to US rap music, UK rap music has not consistently referenced luxury brand names in a manner that would support the notion that 'all' luxury brand references serve as forms of product or brand placement. In addressing this thesis' research inquiry regarding whether all lyrical mentions of luxury brand names constitute forms of product or brand placement, the simple answer is no. A number of UK rap songs reference luxury brand names; however, what distinguishes these mentions from being forms of product or brand placement is the context in which they are situated. The inclusion of a brand name within a song does not inherently imply that the song is endorsing or promoting that brand. One must 'read between the lines' and question what the rapper is saying and how mentioning the luxury brand amplifies that

message. Even if the brand is referenced in an aspirational context, it does not inherently imply that it is product or brand placement. The mention may simply be enhancing the aspirational connotation, which may encompass the rap artist's assertion of their success.

Brand mentions serve to either reinforce or challenge the Black-gendered ideologies that are expressed in rap music (Rose, 1994; Hill Collins). The reference made by a male UK rapper to a luxury brand, when contrasted with his role in providing for his family, serves to reinforce the concept of the Black hustler mentality, as well as the notions of being a provider and boss that are deeply rooted in the construct of Black masculinity (hooks, 1994). A female UK rapper's lyrical reference to a luxury brand, coupled with an assertion of sexual connotations, shifts the emphasis from being perceived merely as a sexual object (Rose, 1994) to embodying the persona of a 'boss' or a woman in command. Therefore, when luxury brands are not strategically positioned according to the framework of product or brand placement, it is imperative to examine the rationale behind their presence. We must contemplate whether their existence serves to subvert societal expectations and mainstream values through resistant capital or whether it aims to assert aspirational and navigational capital.

While there exist examples of non-product or brand placements, there are also instances where brands pay artists for the explicit endorsement of their brands, as noted by Shaybo in Chapter Five. Thus, this serves as an instance of celebrity endorsement (McCracken, 1986). In conjunction with how the rapper references the brand, we observe the application of the meaning transfer model — that is, how meaning is transferred from the brand to the artist and vice versa (ibid). The rap artist inherently embodies specific meanings through their identity, and the manner of their brand mention further influences the listener's perception of that particular product or brand placement. In Chapter Five, Shaybo asserts that brands recognise the profound sonic influence of rap music. In today's world, with the accessibility of streaming platforms, individuals possess the ability to replay songs an infinite number of times. This effect transcends mere product placement, representing a form of sonic 'indoctrination' wherein a brand becomes intricately woven into the 'universe' of the listener. In this context, one can observe the manner in which the luxury fashion sector derives advantages and leverages the cultural currency of the UK African diaspora, especially by virtue of their linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005).

In conclusion, regardless of whether an artist is rapping about black gendered contructs or 'making it out the hood', including luxury brand references amplifies that message, imbuing it with aspirational implications. When the brand name is referenced in a way that suggests a defiance of conventional values, it conveys a significant message; one that hints at authenticity and positions itself within the realm of subcultural anti-fashion perspectives. In such instances, resistant capital is employed.

Product or brand placements within rap songs often occur due to the rapper's professional association with the brand, which may include financial compensation for mentioning the brand. In the absence of brand affiliation, lyrical brand mentions remain precisely that: brand names in lyrics.

8.5 Key original contributions to knowledge: The UK African diaspora's cultural currency within the UK rap and luxury fashion brand interplay

This thesis contributes to the fields of cultural studies and sociology in the areas of rap music, fashion and Afro-diasporic discourse, with a particular focus on the interplay among these three domains. The intersection of rap music and luxury fashion brands has been explored within the context of a broader investigation into the relationship between fashion and music (Miller, 2011), as well as through a specific lens focusing on American hip-hop fashion (Romero, 2012). The focus on rap music and fashion has predominantly undergone Americanization, and while elements of identity are acknowledged, they are often overshadowed by an affinity with conspicuous consumption or ostentation and materialism (Chander and Chandler-Smith, 2005). Rap music has been recognised as an Afro-diasporic art form (Gilroy, 1993; Asante, 2008). However, its intricate relationship with luxury fashion brands within the UK rap context has not been thoroughly examined, with an emphasis on the UK African diaspora youth communities, to which this thesis is a contribution. This matter has not been examined through case studies, the perspectives of currently relevant industry professionals, or an in-depth content analysis of lyrics that are cutting-edge, relatable and of relevance to the modern-day UK African diaspora, particularly among first and second-generation Millennial and Gen Z Black British individuals. This research represents a pioneering effort to explore the intricate relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion brands with considerable depth. It elucidates the processes of decolonisation present within the cultural dynamics of UK rap as well as its intersection with luxury fashion brands while simultaneously illuminating the contemporary identities of Black Britain within the said intersection. Furthermore, this thesis highlights the UK African diaspora's youth's rich heritage and employs Pan-African ideologies to unify their expressions, thereby illustrating the significant impact of the contemporary diaspora's cultural currency. My research instigates the cross-cultural resonance previously defined in the introduction of this thesis and Chapter Five concerning US and UK rap, further contributing to hip hop studies. This work contributes to Black epistemology and illustrates the application of a framework derived from the educational domain, the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005), thereby innovating the measurement of cultural currency within UK rap. This thesis asserts that familial capital is the cornerstone of preserving ethnic identity and decolonial facets in UK rap. Aspirational capital is asserted through the lyrical mentions of luxury brand

names. Navigational and resistant capital is seen within the integration of UK rap artists in the luxury sphere, as seen with the case study of Skepta. Resistant capital is also observed concerning mainstream values, underlining the oppositional stance that UK rap holds with luxury fashion superficialities. This thesis has also demonstrated how social capital has aided in the assimilation of UK rap artists in the luxury fashion brand domain through personal relationships with luxury fashion brand creative directors and designers, and lastly, how linguistic capital is the overarching potency of UK rap as a cultural currency.

This thesis has contributed to our comprehension of the cultural influence embodied by UK rap artists, particularly in relation to how their influences manifest through lyrics that reference luxury brand names and their upholding of fashion identities. It partially builds upon Tulloch's (2010) exploration of style narratives, with a particular focus on the tracksuit. My research has furthered the comprehension of the stylist's role within the UK rap and luxury fashion milieu, elucidating how the stylist enhances the identity of the rap artist, rather than conforming to neoliberal and capitalist imperatives. Furthermore, this thesis broadens the academic conversation surrounding the presence of luxury brand product or brand placements within rap lyrics. It presents a viewpoint that illustrates that not every mention of a luxury brand constitutes a promotional effort; rather, the inclusion of luxury brand names can serve to enrich lyrical narratives and contribute to the subversion or reinforcement of concepts related to Black-gendered constructs.

My research enforces the importance of scholarship in decolonising concepts, assumptions, and constructs by upholding the identities of rap artists and employing a constructivist approach to analyse the interplay between UK rap and luxury fashion brands. This thesis is most likely the first to ever conduct a comprehensive case study of Skepta's relationship with luxury fashion, utilising insights from Grace Ladoja MBE, a seasoned industry professional who has managed Skepta, as well as data from Lash, a respected industry expert and close associate to Skepta, who both possess profound knowledge of UK rap and its intricate evolution within the luxury fashion landscape. Vernon's insights also contributed to the case study of Skepta, giving exclusive insights into how a stylist and UK rapper collaborate. In order to incorporate a Black feminine perspective that levels out the black male-dominated terrain of UK rap, Shaybo's insights have significantly contributed to the body of knowledge and Black epistemology, thereby enabling this thesis to share the perspectives of a female Black UK rapper.

Circling back to the aims of this thesis, it represents a novel contribution to the body of knowledge through the analysis of the interaction between UK rap and luxury fashion brands. This work underscores how UK rap serves as a form of cultural currency within the Black British community, from which the luxury fashion industry derives significant advantage, facilitated by the sonic potency of UK rap songs. The thesis enhances our understanding of the cultural wealth of the UK African diaspora youth manifested through UK rap. It provides illustrative examples of decolonisation within this musical genre, rooted in a profound cognisance of African and Caribbean heritage; this is achieved through a content analysis of lyrics. Through achieving these aims, this thesis presents fresh perspectives into the interplay between rap and luxury fashion, as well as the associated concept, CCW and the application of Pan-African ideologies. Such contributions may serve as valuable tools for future Black scholars engaged in the analysis of contemporary Black cultural resources, while also positioning identity as a fundamental element in fostering a connection to Africa and its diaspora through the mediums of fashion and music.

8.6 Limitations and recommendations for future research

At the outset of my research journey, I found myself determined to undertake more than what was manageable. I was keen to explore the consumer viewpoints regarding the intersection of UK rap and luxury, to facilitate a focus group with working-class aspiring rap artists, and to engage in interviews with representatives from luxury brands. In addition to concerns regarding accessibility, it is evident that these objectives were, in fact, excessively ambitious. Consequently, drawing conclusions regarding the effects of consumerism pertaining to the interplay between UK rap and luxury brands, along with insights from representatives of luxury brands, has been unfeasible for this thesis. Therefore, with respect to the influence on rap audiences, the findings have been formulated based on the viewpoints of the industry professionals who were interviewed.

A notable constraint encountered was the challenge of obtaining access to Skepta himself. While this thesis successfully engaged with Lash, his close friend and associate, along with Grace Ladoja, who managed him, and Nicole Vernon, who has styled him, it would have been particularly valuable to obtain first-hand insights from Skepta himself. As I have articulated in Chapter Four, conducting research involving celebrities presents a variety of limitations and barriers. Conducting an interview with Skepta would have yielded a deeper understanding of the nuanced meanings embedded in his lyrics, as well as his perspectives on the intersection of UK rap and luxury fashion brands.

Furthermore, while my Pan-Africanist stance inclines me to regard Black British individuals as collective descendants from Africa, and while Nicole Vernon represented the Caribbean-British viewpoint within this thesis, it would have been valuable for this research to include perspectives from Caribbean-British rappers. As elaborated upon in Chapter Four, I made enquiries to Caribbean-British rap artists, both male and female; however, I did not receive any responses. Therefore, this thesis does not downplay the heterogeneity of the UK African diaspora, nor does it claim to present a representative sample of interviewees from within it.

Further research involving Millennial and Gen Z rap consumers from the UK African diaspora, especially those hailing from working-class backgrounds, would provide a profound understanding of the ways in which the six forms of community cultural wealth are negotiated within those communities, with a focus on UK rap and luxury fashion brands as the core areas of study. Such an exploration would not only draw attention to the implications and intricacies of the diaspora's cultural wealth, but it would also provide deeper insights into the ways in which rap artists, as brands and fellow Black British people, contribute to the negotiation of aspirations, as well as the role of luxury brands within these negotiations. Furthermore, it would be prudent to consider the inclusion of participants who are not Black or hail from working-class backgrounds. Engaging these individuals in a focus group setting, wherein they listen to Black UK rap music, could serve as a valuable method for assessing the influence of UK African diasporan cultural currency on their perceptions of luxury brands. This represents a promising direction for future research endeavours. Furthermore, exploring the alignment of this thesis with other musical genres, such as Afrobeats, and its growing relationship with luxury fashion brands presents an intriguing avenue for future research. Although I am not a historian, it would be beneficial to have contributions to Black epistemology that continue the pioneering work of Diop (1974) in the context of investigating how Black people in pre-colonial Africa intersected with luxury while also drawing empirical comparisons to the ways in which contemporary rap artists engage with luxury. Such an analysis could reveal similarities or recurring patterns. Numerous future research avenues exist for scholars interested in contributing to Black epistemology, particularly concerning pre-colonial Africa and its relationship to luxury, combined with the role of music during that period. While it is indeed an ambitious endeavour, it would significantly contribute to the reclamation of lost Black knowledge and histories.

8.7 Implications of the research: Theory, practice and policy

Upon reviewing a considerable body of scholarly literature, I discerned the potential for this thesis to serve as a response to existing arguments, to pose challenges and to offer avenues for expansion and reconsideration. Thiong'o's (1986) work asserts that the foremost method of decolonising the mind is through the use of indigenous languages. It is crucial to acknowledge that not all individuals from the Millennial and Gen Z groups in Africa and its diaspora are fluent in their indigenous languages; an effect of the enduring consequences of colonialism, which may not be entirely reversible. Consequently, alternative approaches to decolonisation of the mind warrant consideration, as this thesis illustrates. Considering the media consumption prevalent among the youth, Black representation and Afrocentricity (Asante, 1988) in all forms of media, that proliferate empowerment and amplify ethnic heritage whether through visual imagery, video content, lyrical expressions, or music production, are forms of decolonisation. In a comparable manner, decolonial representations within the luxury fashion sector have the potential to facilitate the decolonisation of thought by counteracting the indoctrination experienced by young Black minds, which is often shaped by the prevailing White gaze that remains central to the luxury industry.

In terms of applying the key findings of this thesis into practice and policy, social impact, equity, diversity, equality and inclusion should be the primary objectives; for reasons no other than creating change. To commence the discussion on practice, it is imperative to focus on the strategies employed in luxury fashion promotion and marketing involving Black rap artists. Brands ought to engage in collaborations that are not only significant but also equitable in value to the rap artists with whom they partner. While it is easier said than done, it is imperative that partnerships are established on the principles of fair exchange rather than exploitation. We have established the multitude of benefits that rap music is so generous with to luxury brands; thus, the playing field should be evened out. There exists a necessity for representation and inclusivity. Luxury fashion brands should prioritise sustainable collaborations with artists from the African diaspora to enhance representation within the industry. Furthermore, it is imperative to promote genuine cultural narratives in branding, thereby enabling rappers to shape their image, especially in collaboration with stylists, magazines, and other cultural intermediaries or professionals within the luxury industry. In undertaking this initiative, we have the opportunity to confront and dismantle the stereotypes and narratives that adversely affect the youth of the African diaspora in the UK, especially among Black men. Furthermore, we can advocate for the inclusion of diverse narratives in media that serve to redefine Black identity through the lenses of rap and fashion. Given the strength of the cultural

currency of the UK African diaspora in music, and acknowledging that this thesis does not fully explore the magnitude of talent and wealth among Black British fashion designers and brands, it is imperative that there be a concerted effort to channel this cultural wealth and rapper endorsement towards Black-owned brands to enhance and proliferate Black ownership. This approach would significantly contribute to empowerment and economic mobility by fostering initiatives that allow emerging rappers to engage in brand partnerships that promote genuine economic growth, rather than exploiting or commodifying Black culture. This strategy serves a dual purpose: it acts as a mechanism for decolonisation while simultaneously preserving and enhancing the cultural wealth of the Black British community. Furthermore, it leverages the realms of fashion and music to elevate visibility and cultivate cultural capital for the diaspora. It is important to cultivate an awareness of cultural production, where the fashion industry is obligated to honour and recognise the cultural origins of rap. This entails not only fostering equitable partnerships, as previously noted, but also addressing the mistreatment of Black consumers within luxury brand and department stores.

In the context of policies, equity in creative partnerships must guarantee that artists from marginalised backgrounds are afforded appropriate compensation and recognition within brand collaborations. Governmental bodies and cultural organisations must extend their support to enhance the creative endeavours of the African diaspora in the UK, particularly in music and fashion while recognising their significant economic and cultural contributions. The findings of this thesis underscore the necessity for educational outreach to advocate for increased representation of Black culture and its impact on fashion within school curriculums and higher education in the UK. Furthermore, this thesis highlights the importance of associated cultural programs that facilitate the deconstruction of stereotypes and foster a more profound understanding of the cultural contributions of the UK African diaspora. In addition, the implications of this thesis suggest the necessity of policies centred on social advocacy and collective upliftment. It is imperative to formulate policies that bolster rappers' social impact endeavours, empowering them to serve as advocates for their communities. Additionally, the promotion of Afro-diasporic unity and Pan-African identity can be achieved through the establishment of cultural policies that foster collaboration and solidarity among African diasporic communities worldwide, thereby amplifying the cross-regional resonance previously articulated in this thesis. Such approaches have the potential to enhance cultural awareness within the realms of fashion and music, as well as in the broader societal context. Furthermore, these approaches will empower young Black individuals to envision themselves within academia, media and the various cultural contributions that shape our world.

8.8 Final reflection and closing remarks

This thesis has illuminated the complex interplay between UK rap artists, cultural dynamics, luxury fashion brands, and the identities and cultural currency of the UK Afro-diasporan youth. My research illustrates the role of UK rap music as an essential component of the contemporary diaspora's youth linguistic capital and art forms (Yosso, 2005; Bramwell, 2011), functioning as a platform for empowerment and self-expression. This phenomenon emerges from familial capital, as it advocates for the awareness and preservation of ethnic heritage. Furthermore, my work examines how UK rappers have adeptly utilised aspirational, social, navigational, and resistant capital in their multifaceted and intricate engagement with the luxury fashion industry. This thesis represents a significant contribution to the critical examination of prevailing narratives concerning the interplay between rap music and luxury fashion (Miller, 2011; Romero, 2012). It has fostered a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding UK rap artist identities, UK rap subcultural fashion identity, and style narratives (Tulloch, 2010). Furthermore, this research engages with the concept of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903; Gilroy, 1993), the African cultural system (Asante, 1988), and the principles of decolonial thought (Diop, 1964; Fanon, 1952; 1961; Thiong'o, 1989), demonstrating how these elements are represented and unwavering in UK rap music and its relationship with dress and luxury fashion brands.

This thesis presents an optimistic viewpoint regarding the recognition and appreciation of the cultural contributions made by marginalised communities, suggesting that such acknowledgement may encourage more inclusive practices within the fashion industry and academia. This thesis emphasises the importance of incorporating the intersectional experiences of Black UK rap artists, industry professionals and Afro-diasporic youth members in Britain. It asserts that one need not venture far to uncover Black epistemology within cultural domains, as every Black individual inherently embodies it.

Bibliography

Abell, C. and Smith, J. (2016). *The Expression of Emotion*. Cambridge University Press.

Abidin, C. (2016). 'Aren't These Just Young, Rich Women Doing Vain Things Online?': Influencer Selfies as Subversive Frivolity. *Social Media + Society*, [online] 2(2), pp.1–17. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116641342.

Abidin, C. (2016b). Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, 161(1), pp.86–100.

Abraha, M. (2021). *A Tracksuit History: From 1930s Sportswear to Lockdown Swag*. [online] www.vice.com. Available at: https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3g8ny/history-of-the-tracksuit.

Abrams, M. (2018). Getting It on the Wrist (Yo!) (Published 2018). *The New York Times*. [online] 22 Nov. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/22/style/watches-rap-lyrics-rolex.html.

Abu-Laban, Gagnon, A.-G. and Tremblay, A. (2022). *Assessing Multiculturalism in Global Comparative Perspective*. Taylor & Francis, p.16.

Adams, K**.** (2009) *Poetic Rhythm: Poetry and the Performance of Pattern*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Adams, R. (2018). 'Home sweet home, that's where I come from, where I got my knowledge of the road and the flow from': Grime music as an expression of identity in postcolonial London. *Popular Music and Society*, 42(4), pp.438–455. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2018.1471774.

Adams, T.M. and Fuller, D.B. (2006). The Words Have Changed But the Ideology Remains the Same: Misogynistic Lyrics in Rap Music. *Journal of Black Studies*, [online] 36(6), pp.938–957. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40034353.

Adegoke, Y. (2018). Grime, Afro bashment, drill ... how black British music became more fertile than ever. *The Guardian*. [online] 1 Jun. Available at:

https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jun/01/grime-afro-bashment-drill-how-black-british-music-became-more-fertile-than-ever.

Adi, H. (2018). *Pan-Africanism: a History*. London Bloomsbury Publishing Plc Bloomsbury Academic.

Adichie (2019). *Purple Hibiscus*. Ditzingen Reclam, Philipp.

Adimora, M. (2022). *How Corteiz Is Redefining Streetwear Culture in the UK*. [online] The NATIVE. Available at: https://thenativemag.com/corteiz-streetwear-culture-in-the-uk/.

AKDEMİR, N. (2018). Visible Expression of Social Identity: The Clothing and Fashion. Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences, 17(4). doi:https://doi.org/10.21547/jss.411181.

Alchin, Machin, T., Martin, N. and Burton, L.J. (2023). Authenticity and Inauthenticity in Adolescents: A Scoping Review. *Adolescent Research Review*, 9. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-023-00218-8.

Aldrich, H. (2015). *Black History Month: Jazz and the Evolution of Music*. [online] The Bubble. Available at: https://www.thebubble.org.uk/culture/history/black-history-month-jazz-and-the-evolution-of-music/.

Aldrich, R. and McCreery, C. (2016). *Crowns and Colonies*. Manchester University Press.

Alim (2006). *Roc the Mic Right*. Routledge.

Alim, Ibrahim, A. and Pennycook, A. (2008). *Global Linguistic Flows*. Routledge.

Aliyu, M. (2021). *Steve Biko and the philosophy of Black consciousness*. [online] Africa at LSE. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2021/08/19/steve-biko-philosophy-of-black-consciousness-theology-south-africa-bio/#:~:text=Black%20consciousness%20was%20beyond%20a [Accessed 25 Aug. 2023].

Allam, A. (2021). *Real Rap, Does Authenticity Even Matter in Hip Hop?* [online] Available at: https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1401&context=showcase.

Allen, N.J. (2021). *THE CURATED ESTATE: A PRACTICE-BASED POP-UP STORE SOLUTION FOR LUXURY FASHION RETAIL INDUSTRY'S ISSUES WITH RACIAL DISCRIMINATION*. [online] etd.ohiolink.edu. Available at: http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=kent1620816314892002.

Allen, S. and Miles, B. (2020). Unapologetic Blackness in Action: Embodied Resistance and Social Movement Scenes in Black Celebrity Activism. *Humanity & Society*, 44(4), pp.375–402. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597620932886.

Allen, T.D. (2009). Book Review: Christian, M. (Ed.). (2002). Black Identity in the 20th Century: Expressions of the U.S. and U.K. African Diaspora. London: Habsib. *Journal of Black Studies*, 39(3), pp.482–487. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934707302276.

Alridge, D.P. and Stewart, J.B. (2005). Introduction: Hip Hop in History: Past, Present, and Future. *The Journal of African American History*, [online] 90(3), pp.190–195. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20063997.

Amadiume, I. (2015). *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. Zed Books

Amatokwu, O.N. (2009). *AN AFROCENTRIC ANALYSIS OF HIP-HOP MUSICAL ART COMPOSITION AND PRODUCTION: ROLES, THEMES, TECHNIQUES, AND CONTEXTS*. [online] Available at: https://scholarshare.temple.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.12613/3717/umi-temple-1090.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

American Psychological Association (2020). *People See Black Men as Larger, More Threatening Than Same-Sized White Men*. [online] Apa.org. Available at: https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/black-men-threatening.

Ana Marta González and Bovone, L. (2013). *Identities Through Fashion*. Berg.

Anderson, C. (2000). *PowerNomics: The National Plan to Empower Black America*. PowerNomics Corporation of America.

Antony, V.A.R. and Chinnamal, Dr.S.K. (n.d.).

Anik, L., Miles, J. and Hauser, R. (2017). *A General Theory of Coolness*. [online] papers.ssrn.com. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3027026.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis Etc.: University of Minnesota Press.

Apparel Online (2018). *Fashion Resource: Streetwear Designer Dapper Dan Re-Opens Shop with Gucci*. [online] go-gale-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org. Available at: https://go-gale-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=ucca&id=GALE.

Appelrouth, S. and Kelly, C. (2013). Rap, Race and the (Re)Production of Boundaries. *Sociological Perspectives*, 56(3), pp.301–326. doi:https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2013.56.3.301.

Appert, C.M. (2016). LOCATING HIP HOP ORIGINS: POPULAR MUSIC AND TRADITION IN SENEGAL. *Africa*, 86(2), pp.237–262. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/s0001972016000036.

Appiah, A. (1992). *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*. London: Methuen.

Appleford, K. (2015). Being seen in your pyjamas: the relationship between fashion, class, gender and space. *Gender, Place & Culture*, [online] 23(2), pp.162–180. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2015.1013439.

Armstrong, L. (2023). 'Burberry should appeal to everyone, from the street to the Royal family'. *The Telegraph*. [online] 7 Oct. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/fashion/brands/burberry-daniel-lee-interview/.

Arnold, R. (2001). *Fashion, desire and anxiety: image and morality in the 20th century*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Arnould and Thompson, C.J. (2018). *Consumer culture theory*. Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington Dc Melbourne Sage.

Asante, M.K (1980). *Afrocentricity: the theory of social change*. Chicago, Illinos: African American Images.

Asante, M.K (1987). *The Afrocentric idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, Post.

Asante, M.K (1988). *Afrocentricity*. Africa World Press.

Asante, M. (2003) The Future of African American Rhetoric. In: Jackson II, R.L. and Richardson, E.B., Eds., *Understanding African-American Rhetoric, Routledge*, UK.

Asante, M.K. (2008). *It's bigger than hip-hop: the rise of the post-hip-hop generation*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Ashcroft, R.T. and Bevir, M. (2017). Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: policy, law and theory. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, [online] 21(1), pp.1–21. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2017.1398443.

Atik, D. and Fırat, A.F. (2013). Fashion creation and diffusion: The institution of marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(7-8), pp.836–860. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2012.729073.

Autor: Virgil Abloh and Warsh, L. (2021). *Abloh-isms*. Editorial: Princeton: Princeton University Press In Association With No More Rulers.

Avery, L.R., Ward, L.M., Moss, L. and Üsküp, D. (2016). Tuning Gender. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 43(2), pp.159–191. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798415627917.

Aydin-Ozturk , T. (2018). Social Capital, Relations and Music World: Networks in New Media. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, 58, pp.91–103. doi:https://doi.org/10.26650/jecs433288.

Azzopardi, A. (2013). *Youth: Responding to Lives An International Reader*. Rotterdam Sensepublishers, pp.11–26.

Back, L. (1996). *New ethnicities and urban culture : racisms in young lives*. London: Ucl Press.

Bahia, J. and Collins, R. (2024). *Stefflon Don: 'People had to get to know me eventually'*. [online] BBC News. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crg7r4kpmelo [Accessed 26 Sep. 2024].

Banaji, M.R., Fiske, S.T. and Massey, D.S. (2021). Systemic racism: individuals and interactions, institutions and society. *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, [online] 6(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-021-00349-3.

Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). *Authentic™ the politics of ambivalence in a brand culture*. New York, N.Y. New York University Press.

Banet-Weiser, S. (2018). *Empowered: popular feminism and popular misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Banfield, B. (2009). *Cultural Codes*. Scarecrow Press.

Baptist, N.K. (2022). Politics in the Key of Life Black Music as Black Activism. *National Review of Black Politics*, [online] 3(1-2), pp.33–49. doi:https://doi.org/10.1525/nrbp.2022.3.1-2.33.

Baraka, A. (1963). *Blues People: Negro music in white America*. New York: Perennial.

Baram, C. (2019). *Why More Luxury Brands are Focusing on Diversity | Mintel*. [online] www.mintel.com. Available at: https://www.mintel.com/insights/retail/why-more-luxury-brands-are-focusing-on-diversity/.

Barnard, M. (1996). *Fashion as communication*. London: Routledge.

Barnard, M. (2013). *Fashion as Communication*. London: Routledge.

Baron, K. (2012). *Stylists: new fashion visionaries*. London: Laurence King Publishing.

Barron, L. (2013). The sound of street corner society: UK grime music as ethnography. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(5), pp.531–547. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549413491937.

Barthes, R. (1957). *Mythologies*. New York: Hill And Wang, A Division Of Farrar, Strauss And Giroux.

Barthes, R. (2010). *The Fashion System*. London: Vintage Books.

Baudelaire, C. (1857). *Les Fleurs du mal*. Auguste Poulet-Malassis.

Bauman, Z. (1992). A Sociological Theory of Postmodernity. *Thesis Eleven*, 29(1), pp.33–46. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/072551369102900104.

BBC (2018). Skepta has been made a chief in Nigeria. *BBC News*. [online] 5 Apr. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-43656184.

BBC (2023). GUAP Gala: The event celebrating under-represented creatives. *BBC News*. [online] 15 Sep. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-66796421.

BBC (2023). *Hip Hop 50 - 1Xtra Celebrates Hip Hop*. [online] www.bbc.co.uk. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p0g2yhfy/hip-hop-50-1xtra-celebrates-hip-hop [Accessed 13 Sep. 2023].

Becker, S. and Sweet, C. (2018). 'What Would I Look Like?' How Exposure to Concentrated Disadvantage Shapes Hip-Hop Artists' Connections to Community. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218784964.

Belk, R.W. (2010). *Research in consumer behaviour. Vol. 12*. Bingley: Emerald.

Belleau, B.D. and Nowlin, K. (2001). Fashion leaders' and followers' attitudes towards exotic leather apparel products. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 5(2), pp.133–144. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/eum0000000007284.

Benda, C. (2021). *Dressing the Resistance*. Chronicle Books, p.18.

Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to Plan and Perform a Qualitative Study Using Content Analysis. *NursingPlus Open*, [online] 2(2), pp.8–14. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352900816000029.

Bennett, A. (1999). *OpenAthens / Sign in*. [online] www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org. Available at: https://www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/stable/3a6f3170-4765-317a-9ee3-c4765fbe3d73 [Accessed 5 Sep. 2023].

Bennett, A., Shank, B. and Toynbee, J. (2010). *The popular music studies reader*. London; New York: Routledge, p.219.

Bennett, A. (2012). Reappraising 'Counterculture'. *Volume !*, (9 : 1), pp.20–31. doi:https://doi.org/10.4000/volume.3499.

Berg (1997). *Fashion Theory 1997 Inhalt*. [online] Available at: http://www.modetheorie.de/fileadmin/Inhalt/f/Fashion_Theory_1997-_Inhalt.pdf [Accessed 28 Nov. 2022].

Berg, L. (2019). Class Related Consumption and the Ability to Resist Commercial Temptations in the Age of Commercialism. *SAGE Open*, 9(2), p.215824401985671. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019856716.

Bernard, J. (2020). *A Brief But In-Depth Dive Into the 40 Year History of UK Hip-Hop & Rap - Okayplayer*. [online] www.okayplayer.com. Available at: https://www.okayplayer.com/originals/uk-hip-hop-artists-rap-90s-music.html.

Bernard, J. (2020). *A Brief But In-Depth Dive Into the 40 Year History of UK Hip-Hop & Rap - Okayplayer*. [online] www.okayplayer.com. Available at: https://www.okayplayer.com/originals/uk-hip-hop-artists-rap-90s-music.html.

Berry, K. (2016). *Singing in Slavery: Songs of Survival, Songs of Freedom | Mercy Street Revealed*. [online] Singing in Slavery: Songs of Survival, Songs of Freedom | Mercy Street Revealed. Available at: http://www.pbs.org/mercy-street/blogs/mercy-street-revealed/songs-of-survival-and-songs-of-freedom-during-slavery/.

Beswick, K. (2019). *Social Housing in Performance*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bhattacharyya, G. (2018). *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival*. London: Rowman & Littlefield Intl.

Bhopal, R.S. (2014). *Migration, ethnicity, race, and health in multicultural societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Billot, S., Pantin-Sohier, G., Sohier, R. and Sohier, A. (2021). *Does the rap wear Dior? The impact of rap endorser on luxury brand personality*. [online] Available at: https://normandie-univ.hal.science/hal-03632422/document.

Bisht, P. (2017). *Decolonizing Futures: Exploring Storytelling as a Tool for Inclusion in Foresight*. [online] Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/154171898.pdf [Accessed 15 Mar. 2024].

Black World/Negro Digest. (1964).

Blackman, S. (2014). Subculture Theory: An Historical and Contemporary Assessment of the Concept for Understanding Deviance. *Deviant Behavior*, 35(6), pp.496–512. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2013.859049.

Blain, K.N. (2023). *Golden-Era Rap Music and the Black Intellectual Tradition - AAIHS*. [online] www.aaihs.org. Available at: https://www.aaihs.org/golden-era-rap-music-and-the-black-intellectual-tradition/ [Accessed 23 Oct. 2023].

Blanchard, B. (2019). *THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RAP & HIP-HOP CULTURE*. [online] Stanford.edu. Available at: https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/mediarace/socialsignificance.htm.

Boakye, J. (2017). *Hold tight: black masculinity, millennials and the meaning of grime*. London: Influx Press.

Boakye, J. (2019). *Black, listed: black British culture explored*. London: Dialogue Books.

Boakye, J. and Ngadi Smart (2021). *Musical truth: a musical history of modern Black Britain in 25 songs*. London: Faber & Faber.

Bond, K.T., Leblanc, N.M., Williams, P., Gabriel, C.-A. and Amutah-Onukagha, N.N. (2021). Race-Based Sexual Stereotypes, Gendered Racism, and Sexual Decision Making Among Young Black Cisgender Women. *Health Education & Behavior*, [online] 48(3), pp.295–305. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/10901981211010086.

Boston, N. (2022). *How the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Created the African Diaspora*. [online] HISTORY. Available at: https://www.history.com/news/african-diaspora-trans-atlantic-slave-trade.

Bosworth, M., Parmar, A. and VázquezY. (2018). *Race, criminal justice, and migration control: enforcing the boundaries of belonging*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1979). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.

Bourgeois, R., Karuri-Sebina, G. and Feukeu, K.E. (2022). The future as a public good: decolonising the future through anticipatory participatory action research. *foresight*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/fs-11-2021-0225.

Bowden, A.K. and Buie, C.R. (2021). Anti-Black racism in academia and what you can do about it. *Nature Reviews Materials*, 6. doi:https://doi.org/10.1038/s41578-021-00361-5.

Boyd, T. (2008). *African Americans and popular culture*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

Boyd, T. (2024). *Rapper's Deluxe*. Phaidon Press.

Braithwaite, J. (1980). *MERTON'S THEORY OF CRIME AND DIFFERENTIAL CLASS SYMBOLS OF SUCCESS*. [online] Available at: https://johnbraithwaite.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/1980_Merton-s-Theory-of-Crime-and-D.pdf.

Bramwell, R. (2011). *The Aesthetics and Ethics of London Based Rap: A Sociology of UK Hip-Hop and Grime*. [online] Available at: https://etheses.lse.ac.uk/189/1/Bramwell_The_Aesthetics_and_Ethics_of_London_based_rap.pdf.

Bramwell, R. (2015). *UK Hip-Hop, Grime and the City: the Aesthetics and Ethics of London's Rap Scenes*. London: Routledge.

Bramwell, R. (2015). Council estate of mind: the British rap tradition and London's hip-hop scene. *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, pp.256–262. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/cco9781139775298.023.

Bramwell, R.J. (2016). *Performing hip-hop Englishness: The performance of alternative British identities through rap*. [online] Ukri.org. Available at: https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH/M011275/3 [Accessed 2 Mar. 2023].

Bramwell, R. and Butterworth, J. (2020). Beyond the street: the institutional life of rap. *Popular Music*, 39(2), pp.169–186. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261143020000355.

Braun, V. and Kitzinger, C. (2001). 'Snatch,' 'Hole,' or 'Honey-Pot'? Semantic Categories and the Problem of Nonspecificity in Female Genital Slang. *The Journal of Sex Research*, [online] 38(2), pp.146–158. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3813705 [Accessed 23 Oct. 2023].

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77–101. doi:https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Breward, C., Lemire, B. and Riello, G. (2023). *The Cambridge Global History of Fashion: Volume 2*. Cambridge University Press, pp.969–993.

BRIGGS, A. and COBLEY, P. (1999). 'I Like My Shit Sagged': Fashion, 'Black Musics' and Subcultures. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2(3), pp.337–352. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.1999.10593046.

Brinkley, S. (2008). *The Essence of Res(ex)pectability: Black Women's Negotiation of Black Femininity in Rap Music and Music Video*. [online] www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org. Available at: https://www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/stable/40338919?seq=2 [Accessed 15 May 2023].

Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Britannica (2018). social class | Definition, Theories, & Facts. In: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. [online] Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-class.

Brodin, O., Coulibaly, D. and Ladwein, R. (2016). Subcultural ostensive luxury as a creative and mimetic process: The case of the Sapeurs Parisiens. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing (English Edition)*, 31(1), pp.43–63. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/2051570715626373.

Brooksworth, F., Mogaji, E. and Bosah, G. (2022). *Fashion Marketing in Emerging Economies Volume I*. Springer Nature.

Brown, D. (2011). Afro-Colombian women braid messages of freedom in hairstyles. *Washington Post*. [online] 8 Jul. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/afro-colombian-women-braid-messages-of-freedom-in-hairstyles/2011/07/08/gIQA6X9W4H_story.html.

Brown, K. (2006). *Encyclopedia of language & linguistics. Vol. 1*. Amsterdam Elsevier, pp.495–501.

Brown, M. (2015). The Human Zoo: A Critique of Brett Bailey's Exhibit B. *Digital Literature Review*, 2, pp.106–113. doi:https://doi.org/10.33043/dlr.2.0.106-113.

Brown, N. (2021). *Female artists help to drive record consumption of rap and hip hop*. [online] The Breaker. Available at: https://www.thebreaker.co.uk/female-artists-help-to-drive-record-consumption-of-rap-and-hip-hop/ [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Brown, R.K. (1973). *Knowledge, education, and cultural change: papers in the sociology of education*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, p.42.

Brumfitt, S. and Maoui, Z. (2020). *Eleven times Skepta proved he is London's best-dressed*. [online] British GQ. Available at: https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/skepta-skair-nike-style.

Brun, A. and Castelli, C. (2013). The Nature of luxury: a Consumer Perspective. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 41(11/12), pp.823–847. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/ijrdm-01-2013-0006.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bulhan, H.A. (2015). Stages of Colonialism in Africa: From Occupation of Land to Occupation of Being. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 3(1), pp.239–256. doi:https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v3i1.143.

Burberry (2022). *Our History*. [online] Burberry. Available at: https://uk.burberry.com/c/our-history/.

Burkhalter, J.N. and Thornton, C.G. (2012). Advertising to the beat: An analysis of brand placements in hip-hop music videos. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20(5), pp.366–382. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2012.710643.

Burns, G. (2016). *A companion to popular culture*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.

Byrd, R. (2017). In Search of the Good Life: Toward a Discourse on Reading the Black Body in Hip-Hop and Luxury Fashion. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 4(3), p.180. doi:https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.4.3.0180.

Cabalquinto, J. (2020). Effect of Hip Hop on Youth Consumerism. *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research*, [online] 8, p.3. Available at: https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1116&context=pjcr.

Cabigiosu, A. (2020). An Overview of the Luxury Fashion Industry. *Palgrave Advances in Luxury*, [online] 9(31), pp.9–31. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48810-9_2.

Caliendo, S.M. and McIlwain, C.D. (2010). *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*. Routledge.

Campbell, M. (2022). *How to Care More*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Cantista, I. and Sádaba T. (2020). *Understanding luxury fashion: from emotions to brand building*. Cham, Suiza: Palgrave Macmillan.

Canton, W. (2022). I Spit Therefore I Am: Rap and Knowledge. *Interfere - University of Brighton*, [online] 3. Available at: https://cris.brighton.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/35801706/Canton2022.pdf.

Carolyn Elizabeth Alchin, Machin, T., Martin, N. and Burton, L.J. (2023). Authenticity and Inauthenticity in Adolescents: A Scoping Review. *Adolescent Research Review*, 9. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-023-00218-8.

Carpan, C. (2022). Racial Profiling and Second-Class Citizenship. *Political Studies*, 72(1), p.003232172210991. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217221099101.

Carson, H.J. (2014). The Medium, Not the Message: How Tattoos Correlate With Early Mortality. *American Journal of Clinical Pathology*, 142(1).

Cartier (2022). *Story & Heritage - Cartier*. [online] Cartier.com. Available at: https://www.cartier.com/en-gb/maison/the-story/story-and-heritage.

Castillo, M. (2014). Dress for Success. *American Journal of Neuroradiology*, 35(11), pp.2027–2028. doi:https://doi.org/10.3174/ajnr.a3942.

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (2004). *EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*. Routledge. doi:https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203639948.

Chang, J. (2005). *Can't stop won't stop: a history of the Hip-hop generation*. New York: Picador.

Channel 4 Documentaries (2023). *UNTOLD: Addicted To Drip | Channel 4 Documentaries*. [online] YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEPgLIRoLZ8&ab_channel=Channel4Documentaries [Accessed 6 Jun. 2024].

Charles, A. 'Dotty' C. (2022). *The Rise And Rise Of Little Simz*. [online] Grazia. Available at: https://graziadaily.co.uk/celebrity/style/little-simz-hip-hop-fashion-shoot/.

Charles, M. (2022). *25 Years of Garage review – music documentary falls prey to the same mistakes that killed the scene*. [online] The Conversation. Available at: https://theconversation.com/25-years-of-garage-review-music-documentary-falls-prey-to-the-same-mistakes-that-killed-the-scene-196329 [Accessed 19 Jul. 2024].

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.

Charry, E. (2012). *Hip hop Africa: New African music in a globalizing world*. Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press, pp.79–91.

Chen, Q., Wang, Y. and Ordabayeva, N. (2022). The Mate Screening Motive: How Women Use Luxury Consumption to Signal to Men. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 50(2), pp.303–321. doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucac034.

Chevalier, M. and Mazzalovo, G. (2012). *Luxury brand management: a world of privilege*. Singapore: Wiley.

Childs, M. and Jones, D. (2020). Blackface sweaters and pizza with chopsticks: Problem cases and strategies for converting cultural appropriation into cultural appreciation in the

fashion industry. *Journal of Cultural Marketing Strategy*, [online] 5(2), pp.143–152. Available at: https://www.henrystewartpublications.com/sites/default/files/JCMSv5.2Blackface%20sweaters%20and%20pizza%20with%20chopsticks%20Problem%20cases%20and%20strategies%20for%20converting%20cultural%20appropriation%20into%20cultural%20appreciation%20in%20the%20fashion%20industry.pdf.

Chipato (2023). The Global Politics of African Identity: Pan-Africanism and the Challenge of Afropolitanism. *Global studies quarterly*, [online] 3(3). doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksad046.

Cho, E., Kim-Vick, J. and Yu, U.-J. (2021). Unveiling Motivations for Luxury Fashion Purchase among Gen Z consumers: Need for Uniqueness versus Bandwagon Effect. *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education*, [online] 15(1), pp.24–34. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/17543266.2021.1973580.

Chuks, M., Francis (2018). Ozo Title: An Indigenous Institution In Traditional Religion That Upholds Patriarchy In Igbo Land South-Eastern Nigeria. *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, 5(5), pp.4640–4652. doi:https://doi.org/10.18535/ijsshi/v5i5.02.

Clarke and Thomas, D.A. (2006). *Globalization and Race*. Duke University Press, pp.299–315.

Clarke, J.H. (1989). The Historical Legacy of Cheikh Anta Diop: His Contributions To A New Concept of African History. *Présence Africaine*, 149-150(1), p.110. doi:https://doi.org/10.3917/presa.149.0110.

Clay, C. and Bichard, S. (2019). London, Lyrics, & Louis Vuitton: A Cross-Cultural Content Analysis of Product Placement in Popular Music. *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal*, 30(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.58997/smc.v30i1.3.

CNN, H.Z. (2021). *Highly educated Black and Asian Brits are disadvantaged at work.* [online] CNN. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/29/business/uk-ethnic-minorities-employment-report/index.html.

Cochran, S.M. (2015). Hip-Hop Commercialism and the Destructive Exploitation of Young Black Males: In Search of Joseph. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, 3(2), p.45. doi:https://doi.org/10.2979/spectrum.3.2.45.

Cochrane, T., Fantini, B. and Scherer, K.R. (2013). *The Emotional Power of Music: Multidisciplinary perspectives on musical arousal, expression, and social control*. Oxford: OUP Oxford.

Cochrane, L. (2014). *G2: Style: Street smart: The Bathing Ape founder, who once made exclusive streetwear for hip-hop stars, is now trying something a little less bling - designing pounds 10 T-shirts for a high-street chain.* [online] Gale Academic OneFile. Available at: https://go-gale-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=ucca&id=GALE.

Codrington, R. (2006). The Homegrown. *Globalization and Race*, pp.299–315. doi:https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822387596-015.

Cole, R.R. (1971). Top Songs in the Sixties. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 14(3), pp.389–400. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/000276427101400311.

Coleman, J. (2018). Mūsā I of Mali | emperor of Mali. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. [online] Available at: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Musa-I-of-Mali.

Collins, H. and Rose, O. (2016). *This is grime*. London: Hodder.

Collins, P.H. (1990). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Collins, P.H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Connell (2005). *Gender*. Cambridge; Malden, Mass.: Polity Press.

Connell, R.W. (2005). *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity.

Conti, S. (2019). *Harrods Opens Men's Space With Brand Names, Not Categories, Dominating*. [online] WWD. Available at: https://wwd.com/feature/harrods-opens-mens-space-brand-names-categories-dominating-1203349279/ [Accessed 31 Aug. 2023].

Cook, M. (1939). The Race Problem in Paris and the French West Indies. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 8(4), p.673. doi:https://doi.org/10.2307/2292908.

Cooper, H., Miller, D. and Merrilees, B. (2015). Restoring luxury corporate heritage brands: From crisis to ascendency. *Journal of Brand Management*, 22(5), pp.448–466. doi:https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2015.9.

Cornell University (2020). *How Diffusion Influences the World of Fashion: Networks Course blog for INFO 2040/CS 2850/Econ 2040/SOC 2090*. [online] Cornell University. Available at: https://blogs.cornell.edu/info2040/2020/12/16/how-diffusion-influences-the-world-of-fashion/.

Council for International African Fashion Education (2022). *Council for International African Fashion Education - Illuminating Black Culture's Influence on Fashion*. [online] CIAFE. Available at: https://www.ciafe.org/post/recommended-resource-illuminating-black-culture-s-influence-on-fashion [Accessed 15 Jul. 2023].

Couto, L., Hust, S.J.T., Rodgers, K.B., Kang, S. and Li, J. (2022). A Content Analysis of Music Lyrics Exploring the Co-Occurrence of Violence, Sexual Content, and Degrading Terms Toward Women. *Sexuality & Culture*, 26(6). doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-09978-2.

Covington, S. (2024). *Decentering and decolonizing fashion and dress*. [online] BLOOMSBURY. Available at: https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/discover/bloomsbury-academic/blog/featured/decentering-and-decolonizing-fashion-and-dress/.

Cox, O. (2023). *Corteiz Rules the World*. [online] Culted. Available at: https://culted.com/the-cult-of-corteiz-streetwear/.

Craig, C. and Bichard, S. (2014). London, Lyrics, & Louis Vuitton: A Cross-Cultural Content Analysis of Product Placement in Popular Music. *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal*, 30(1).

Craig, C., Flynn, M.A. and Holody, K.J. (2017). Name Dropping and Product Mentions: Branding in Popular Music Lyrics. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 23(2), pp.258–276. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2016.1267679.

Craig, R.T. (2015). 'I Know What Them Girls Like'. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 40(1), pp.25–45. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859915585170.

Craik, J. (2003). *The face of fashion: cultural studies in fashion*. London: Routledge.

Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design : Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.* 3rd ed. [online] Sage Publications, Inc. Available at: https://www.ucg.ac.me/skladiste/blog_609332/objava_105202/fajlovi/Creswell.pdf.

Cross, B. (1994). *It's Not about a Salary - Rap, Race, and Resistance in Los Angeles*. Verso Books.

Cusick, J. (2022). Popular Culture, Subcultures & Counterculture. *opentextbc.ca*. [online] Available at: https://opentextbc.ca/peersupport/chapter/popular-culture-subcultures-counterculture/#:~:text=However%2C%20different%20from%20a%20subculture.

Cutler, S. (2013). *Hip-hop fashion: from street culture to mass appeal*. [online] Cornell Chronicle. Available at: https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2013/12/hip-hop-fashion-street-culture-mass-appeal.

Cutler, S. (2017). Redefining Representations of Black Female Subjectivity through the Erotic. *A Woman's Experience (AWE)*, [online] 4(3), p.3. Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=awe.

Da Graca, M. and Dougherty, L. (2015). *First Generation College Students: Community Cultural Wealth*. [online] First Generation College Students: Navigating Higher Education. Available at: https://scalar.usc.edu/works/first-generation-college-student-/community-cultural-wealth.10#:~:text=Yosso.

Daily Telegraph (2020). *THE SHOW MAN; Matthew Williams Has Gone from Lady Gaga's Costumier to top dog at Givenchy Couture - with a Moncler collaboration on the side. It's been a wild ride, he tells Caroline Leaper.* [online] go-gale-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org. Available at: https://go-gale-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=ucca&id=GALE.

Dale, P., Burnard, P. and Raphael Travis Jr (2023). *Music for Inclusion and Healing in Schools and Beyond*. Oxford University Press.

Danesi, M. (2006). Clothing: Semiotics. *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, pp.495–501. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/b0-08-044854-2/01399-7.

Danesi, M. (2008). *Language, society, and culture: introducing anthropological linguistics*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Daniels, M. (2019). *Why Independent Musicians Are Becoming the Future of the Music Industry*. [online] Forbes. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/melissamdaniels/2019/07/10/for-independent-musicians-goingyour-own-way-is-finally-starting-to-pay-off/.

Davids, N. (2024). Decolonization in South African universities: storytelling as subversion and reclamation. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 58(2-3). doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/jopedu/qhae029.

Davies, S.J. (1994). *Musical meaning and expression*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Davies, S. (2021). How UK rap became a multimillion-pound business. *Financial Times*. [online] 9 Aug. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/58ecd23f-e1e7-4932-9d70-c57f1b170851.

Davis, F. (1992). *Fashion, culture, and identity*. Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press.

Davis, A.Y. (1998). *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. Vintage.

Davis, A.Y. (1998). *Blues legacies and Black feminism: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*. New York: Vintage.

Davis, A.Y. (1999). *Blues legacies and Black feminism: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*. New York: Vintage, pp.91–119.

Davis, E. and Pereira, J. (2016). Using Song Lyrics to Enhance Counselor Trainee Perceptions of their Reflective Listening Skills. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 8(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.7729/81.1066.

Davis, M. (2011). *HIP-HOP AND PRODUCT PLACEMENT: THE STRUGGLE TO 'KEEP IT REAL'*. [online] Available at: https://wp.rutgers.edu/attachments/article/518/davis.pdf [Accessed 4 Aug. 2024].

Day, E. (2008). *Why racism stalked the London catwalk*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/feb/17/fashion.londonfashionweek.

Day, D.R. (2020). *DAPPER DAN: made in harlem.* S.L.: Random House.

Dazed Magazine (2018). *Why African and Caribbean sounds are dominating British music right now*. [online] Dazed. Available at: https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/40165/1/afroswing-african-and-caribbean-s-dominating-british-music.

De Saussure (1916). *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 19 Jan.

Dedman, T. (2011). Agency in UK hip-hop and grime youth subcultures – peripherals and purists. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(5), pp.507–522. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2010.549820.

Delaney, T. (2007). *Pop Culture: An Overview*. [online] Philosophy Now. Available at: https://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop_Culture_An_Overview.

Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

Delgado, R., Stefancic, J. and Harris, A. (2006). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction Chapter 1*. [online] Available at: https://jordaninstituteforfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Delgado_and_Stefancic_on_Critical_Race_Theory.pdf.

Delgado, R., Stefancic, J. and Harris, A. (2006). *Join our email list! Top» Catalog A Note From The Director from Critical Race Theory: An Introduction Chapter 1*. [online] Available at: https://jordaninstituteforfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Delgado_and_Stefancic_on_Critical_Race_Theory.pdf.

Delgado, H.N. (2022). Black masculinities: Dress, fashion and style as gendered racialized experiences. *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*, 9(1), pp.39–40. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/csmf_00049_2.

Delpeuch, C. (2009). *A short analytical history of cotton institutions in West Africa*. [online] Available at: https://ecipe.org/wp-

content/uploads/2014/12/Delpeuch_a_short_analyitical_history_cotton-institutions_WestAfrica102009.pdf.

Den, V. and Behrer, M. (2016). *How cool brands stay hot : Branding to generation Y and Z*. London: Koganpage.

Dennis, I. (2022). Virgil Abloh: Where luxury fashion and hip-hop intersect. *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2011). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Dhaliwal, R. (2021). *TOP 5 GREATEST NON-GRADUATE RAPPERS*. [online] I Am Hip-Hop Magazine. Available at: https://www.iamhiphopmagazine.com/top-5-greatest-non-graduate-rappers/ [Accessed 6 Jun. 2024].

Dion, D. and Borraz, S. (2017). Managing Status: How Luxury Brands Shape Class Subjectivities in the Service Encounter. *Journal of Marketing*, [online] 81(5), pp.67–85. doi:https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0291.

Diop (1974). *The African origin of civilization: myth or reality*. New York: Lawrence Hill.

Diop (1987). *Precolonial Black Africa.* Lawrence Hill & Co.

Dittmar, H. and Pepper, L. (2019). Materialistic Values, Relative Wealth and Person Perception: Social Psychological Belief Systems of Adolescents From Different Socio-Economic Backgrounds. *ACR Special Volumes*, [online] SV-08. Available at: https://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12191/volumes/sv08/SV%20-%2008.

DIY Magazine (2016). *Skepta talks staying independent - 'I did nearly crack and take a deal at one point'*. [online] DIY. Available at: https://diymag.com/news/skepta-bbk-independence-interview [Accessed 10 Sep. 2024].

Drake, S.C. and Henderson, D.K. (2020). *Are You Entertained?: Black Popular Culture in the Twenty-First Century on JSTOR*. [online] www.jstor.org. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1131bwx [Accessed 10 Jun. 2023].

Drew, C. (2023). *35 Cultural Influence Examples (2023)*. [online] helpfulprofessor.com. Available at: https://helpfulprofessor.com/cultural-influence-examples/.

Driessens, O. (2014). Expanding celebrity studies' research agenda: theoretical opportunities and methodological challenges in interviewing celebrities. *Celebrity Studies*, 6(2), pp.192–205. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2014.970653.

Drisko, J.W. and Maschi, T. (2016). *Content analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (1903). *The Souls of Black folk*. A. C. McClurg and Co.

Du Bois, W.E.B (1947). *The world and Africa: an inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history, by W.E. Burghardt Du Bois.* Mansfield Centre, Ct: Martino Publishing.

Dunn, S. (2010). *'Baad Bitches' and Sassy Supermamas*. University of Illinois Press.

Durham, A., Cooper, B.C. and Morris, S.M. (2013). The Stage Hip-Hop Feminism Built: A New Directions Essay. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(3), pp.721–737. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/668843.

Dyson, De Ridder, Asibey, R. and Pharrell (2019). *Jay-Z : made in America*. Amsterdam: Spectrum.

Eastman, J.K., Shin, H. and Ruhland, K. (2020). The Picture of Luxury: Millennials' Relationship with Luxury Brands: An Abstract. *Marketing Opportunities and Challenges in a Changing Global Marketplace*, pp.429–430. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39165-2_173.

Eckman, M.J. (1992). *Consumers' aesthetic evaluation of clothing: The effect of age, sex, and fashion involvement*. [Doctoral Thesis/Disseration] Available at: https://www.proquest.com/docview/304018497/fulltextPDF/E2B52648312C4689PQ/1?accountid=14178.

Edwards, R.S. (2020). *Murder Music: A Content Analysis of Anti-LGBT Lyrics in Jamaican Dancehall Songs*.

Efremov, J., Kertakova, M. and Dimitrijeva-Kuzmanovska, V. (2021). Expression of personality through dressing. *Tekstilna industrija*, 69(1), pp.28–35. doi:https://doi.org/10.5937/tekstind2101028e.

Ekpoudom, A. (2024). Bait, ting, certi: how UK rap changed the language of the nation. *The Guardian*. [online] 9 Apr. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2024/apr/09/bait-ting-certi-how-uk-rap-changed-the-language-of-the-nation [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Elam, H.J. and Jackson, K. (2010). *Black Cultural Traffic*. University of Michigan Press.

Elliott, M. (2017). *Don't judge me for wearing a tracksuit, it's part of my culture*. [online] University of Manchester. Available at: https://thetab.com/uk/manchester/2017/10/16/dont-judge-me-for-wearing-a-tracksuit-to-the-pub-30139.

Entwistle, J. and Wilson, E. (2001). *Body dressing*. Oxford U.K.; New York: Berg.

Entwistle (2009). *The aesthetic economy of fashion: markets and value in clothing and modelling*. Oxford; New York: Berg.

Entwistle, J. (2015). *The fashioned body*. Cambridge Polity Press.

Entwistle, J. (2015). *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, dress, and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge Polity Press.

Entwistle, J. (2016). The Fashioned Body15 Years On: Contemporary Fashion Thinking. *Fashion Practice*, 8(1), pp.15–21. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2016.1147693.

Epochi-Olise, R. and Monye, P. (2021). Women and 'the Other Room': Emancipating the Society.. *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*, 8(1 & 2), pp.46–62. doi:https://doi.org/10.4314/contjas.v8i1.5.

Equalnox Clothing (2023). *How Nike Is Blurring Pop Culture and High Fashion*. [online] EQUALNOX CLOTHING CO. Available at: https://equalnoxclothing.com/blogs/news/how-nike-is-blurring-pop-culture-and-high-fashion.

Evans, D.J. (n.d.). Black Music as a Reflection of Black Life: Black Political Music, Hip Hop & the Changing Same . [online] Available at:

https://bluetigercommons.lincolnu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=philosophy_and_theology.

Facchinetti, R., Crystal, D. and Seidlhofer, B. (2010). *From international to local English - and back again*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Falola (2024). *Writing the History of the African Diaspora*. Cambridge University Press.

Fanon, F. (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Penguin Books.

Fanon, F. (1961). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Farrant, T. (2023). *How Corteiz became the most hyped streetwear brand in the UK*. [online] euronews. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/culture/2023/03/17/the-rise-of-corteiz-inside-the-genius-marketing-strategies-of-londons-hottest-streetwear-b.

Farwell, T., Stickle, B. and Shackelford, D. (2023). Brands and Product Mentions in Rap Music: An Analysis of Branded Entertainment in Rap Music Lyrics From 2006-2020. *Journal of the Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association*, 23(1), pp.81–113. doi:https://doi.org/10.25101/23.3.

Fatsis, L. (2018). Grime: Criminal subculture or public counterculture? A critical investigation into the criminalization of Black musical subcultures in the UK. *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, [online] 15(3), pp.447–461. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659018784111.

Fatsis, L. (2019). Policing the beats: the Criminalisation of UK Drill and Grime Music by the London Metropolitan Police. *The Sociological Review*, [online] 67(6), pp.1300–1316. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026119842480.

Favell, A. (2020). Crossing the Race Line: 'No Polish, No Blacks, No Dogs' in Brexit Britain? or, the Great British Brexit Swindle. *Research in Political Sociology*, 27, pp.103–130. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/s0895-993520200000027012.

Feinberg, R.A., Mataro, L. and Burroughs, W.J. (1992). Clothing and Social Identity. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 11(1), pp.18–23. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302x9201100103.

Felix, P.M. (2016). A survey of university students views on the nature and significance of nicknames to the Shona people of Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 8(6), pp.81–87. doi:https://doi.org/10.5897/jasd2015.0367.

Felmlee, D., Inara Rodis, P. and Zhang, A. (2019). Sexist Slurs: Reinforcing Feminine Stereotypes Online. *Sex Roles*, 83, pp.16–28. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-01095-z.

Fening, P.A.F., Agyei, I.K. and Adu-Boachie, C. (2023). THE RHYTHM OF GLOBALIZATION AND PERSISTENCE OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GOLD JEWELLERY IN ASANTE, GHANA. *SIBATIK JOURNAL Jurnal Ilmiah Bidang Sosial Ekonomi Budaya Teknologi dan Pendidikan*, [online] 2(9). Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373216021_THE_RHYTHM_OF_GLOBALIZATION_AND_PERSISTENCE_OF_THE_SOCIO-CULTURAL_SIGNIFICANCE_OF_GOLD_JEWELLERY_IN_ASANTE_GHANA.

Ferguson, N.S. and Burkhalter, J.N. (2015). Yo, DJ, That's My Brand: An Examination of Consumer Response to Brand Placements in Hip-Hop Music. *Journal of Advertising*, [online] 44(1), pp.47–57. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24749819.

Finnegan, R.H. (1970). *Oral literature in Africa*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Open Book Publishers.

Fleetwood, N.R. (2011). *Troubling Vision*. University of Chicago Press.

Fleetwood-Smith, R., Hefferon, K. and Mair, C. (2019). 'It's like... it's me': Exploring the lived experience of clothing attachment during wear. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 6(1), pp.41–62. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/infs.6.1.41_1.

Fleetwood, D. (2022). *The Role of Rap Music in Shaping Perceptions of Self and Society in African American Men: A Grounded Theory Study*. [online] Available at: https://www.proquest.com/docview/2748275370?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses.

Fonseca, A.J. (2019). *Listen to rap!: Exploring a musical genre*. Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, An Imprint Of Abc-Clio, Llc.

Form, W. and Wilterdink, N. (2018). social structure | Definition, Examples, Characteristics, & Facts. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. [online] Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-structure.

Forman, M. (2000). 'Represent': race, space and place in rap music. *Popular Music*, 19(1), pp.65–90. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261143000000015.

Forman, M. (2002). *The 'hood comes first: race, space and place in rap and hip-hop*. Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan University.

Forman, M. and Neal (2012). *The hip-hop studies reader*. Routledge.

Forman, M. and Neal (2012). *That's the joint!: the hip-hop studies reader*. New York: Routledge.

Ferguson, N.S. (2008). *BLING BLING BRAND MENTIONS: MEASURING PRODUCT PLACEMENT EFFECTIVENESS IN HIP-HOP MUSIC*. PhD Thesis.

Francis, K. (2015). *Her - Storiography: Pierre Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, and Changing the Narrative Paradigm*. [online] www.proquest.com. Available at: https://www.proquest.com/docview/1752517585?parentSessionId=ZJ1f5xiej0mnPjIT%2FUXxnehXAITdG7ZonLCSm85zqQY%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=14178 [Accessed 17 Jul. 2023].

Frank, T. (1997). *The Conquest of Cool Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. University Of Chicago Press.

Frankie Collective (n.d.). *Harlem's Hip Hop Couturier is back - Gucci x Dapper Dan*. [online] Frankie Collective. Available at: https://frankiecollective.com/blogs/frankie-collective/harlems-hip-hop-couturier-is-back-gucci-x-dapper-dan [Accessed 9 Jun. 2024].

French, H.W. (2021). *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War*. Liveright Publishing.

Fryer, P. (1984). *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London: Plutopress.

Fuller, D.Q., Champion, L., Cristina Cobo Castillo and Anna den Hollander (2024). Cotton and post-Neolithic investment agriculture in tropical Asia and Africa, with two routes to West

Africa. *Journal of Archaeological Science Reports*, 57, pp.104649–104649. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2024.104649.

Gamble, S. (2021). *How music empowers: listening to modern rap and metal*. Milton: Taylor And Francis.

Gamson, J. (1994). *Claims to fame: celebrity in contemporary America*. Berkeley: University Of California Press.

Garfield, G. (2016). *Violence and the Black Male Body*. [online] Reinventing Peace. Available at: https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2016/05/11/violence-and-the-black-male-body/ [Accessed 29 Jul. 2023].

Garlick, Sarah (2022). *Ethnic group, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics*. [online] www.ons.gov.uk. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=In%20England%20the%20percentage%20of.

Garnes, L.J. (2009). *Can't Knock the Hustle": Hustler Masculinity in African American Culture*. [PhD Thesis] Available at: https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:182492/datastream/PDF/view [Accessed 5 Jul. 2023].

Garratt, J. (2019). *Music and politics: a critical introduction*. Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Garriott, P.O. (2019). A Critical Cultural Wealth Model of First-Generation and Economically Marginalized College Students' Academic and Career Development. *Journal of Career Development*, 47(1), p.089484531982626. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845319826266.

Garvey, M. (1923). *The philosophy and opinions of Marcus Garvey*. South Africa: Staging Post.

Gelder, K. and Thornton, S. (1997). *The subcultures reader*. London Routledge.

Genius (2014). *Genius – About Genius*. [online] Genius. Available at: https://genius.com/Genius-about-genius-annotated.

Genius (n.d.). *Lancey Foux – MR. LANCEY*. [online] genius.com. Available at: https://genius.com/Lancey-foux-mr-lancey-lyrics [Accessed 13 Feb. 2023].

Genius (n.d.). *When did Skepta start making music?* [online] Genius. Available at: https://genius.com/artists/Skepta/q/start-making-music#:~:text=Skepta [Accessed 7 Jun. 2024].

George, N. (1988). *The Death of Rhythm & Blues*. Pantheon Books.

Ghaedi, A. and Izadi, B. (2023). The role of famous athlete endorsement in Consumers' Attention to Sports Products: Alpha and Beta Brain Waves. *European Journal of Studies in Management and Business*, 26, pp.38–52. doi:https://doi.org/10.32038/mbrq.2023.26.03.

Gheyle, N. and Jacobs, T. (2017). *Content Analysis: a short overview*. [online] ResearchGate. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321977528_Content_Analysis_a_short_overview.

Gilbert, K.L., Ransome, Y., Dean, L.T., DeCaille, J. and Kawachi, I. (2022). Social Capital, Black Social Mobility, and Health Disparities. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 43(1), pp.173–191. doi:https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-052020-112623.

Gilroy, P. (1987). *There ain't no black in the Union Jack: the cultural politics of race and nation*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.

Gilroy, P. (2000). *Against race: imagining political culture beyond the color line*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press Of Harvard University Press.

Gilroy, P. (2004). *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial culture?* Abingdon: Routledge.

Gilroy, P. (2010). *Darker than blue: on the moral economies of Black Atlantic culture*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.

Given, L. (2008). *Constructivism - SAGE Research Methods*. [online] methods.sagepub.com. Available at: https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/sage-encyc-qualitative-research-methods/n64.xml#:~:text=Constructivism%20rejects%20the%20idea%20that.

Godart, F. (2019). The power structure of the fashion industry: Fashion capitals, globalization and creativity. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 1(1), pp.39–55. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/infs.1.1.39_1.

Goedluck, L. (2019). *How the UK Music Scene Is Influenced by the African Diaspora*. [online] Highsnobiety. Available at: https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/uk-music-african-influence/.

Gogarty, J. (2024). *Ghetts on UK rap, the politics of growing up and why there's nothing quite like recording in Gucci slippers*. [online] British GQ. Available at: https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/ghetts-interview-2024 [Accessed 9 Jul. 2024].

Gold Presidents (2021). *Understanding Jewelry Slang Terms Used in Rap & Hip Hop*. [online] Pres. Available at: https://goldpresidents.com/blogs/news/understanding-rap-hip-hop-jewelry-terminology-and-slang [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Golden, A. (2019). Generation Z Re-Defining the Business of Music . *Berklee College of Music - Music Business Journal*. [online] Available at: https://www.thembj.org/2019/09/generation-z-re-defining-the-business-of-music/.

Goldthorpe, J.H., Catriona Llewellyn and Clive Payne (1980). *Social mobility and class structure in modern Britain*. Oxford Oxfordshire: Clarendon Press ; New York.

Goodman, N. (1968). *Languages of art: an approach to a theory of symbols*. Indianapolis, Ind. Hackett [20]08.

Google Arts and Culture (2018). *Grace Ladoja receives an MBE from the Prince of Wales*. [online] Google Arts & Culture. Available at: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/grace-ladoja-receives-an-mbe-from-the-prince-of-wales/yAFvCcAD2tHTwQ?hl=en [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Gosselin, V. (2021). *Collaboration between luxury and sportswear: what are the roots?* [online] Heuritech. Available at: https://www.heuritech.com/articles/industry-insights/luxury-teams-up-with-sports/ [Accessed 27 Aug. 2023].

GötzN., Brewis, G. and Steffen Werther (2020). *Humanitarianism in the modern world the moral economy of famine relief*. Cambridge New York Port Melbourne New Delhi Singapore Cambridge University Press.

GQ (2021). *What's with all the hip-hop balaclavas?* [online] British GQ. Available at: https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/fashion/article/hip-hop-balaclavas.

Granik, D. (2017). Role of Vogue Magazine in the Transformation of Screen Characters into Style Icons. *ZoneModa Journal*, [online] 7, pp.25–35. doi:https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0563/7646.

Grazian, D. (2009). Urban Nightlife, Social Capital, and the Public Life of Cities. *Sociological Forum*, [online] 24(4), pp.908–917. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40542603.

Greenburg, Z.O. (2016). *The Real Story Behind Jay Z's Champagne Deal*. [online] Forbes. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2014/11/06/why-jay-zs-champagne-news-isnt-so-new/.

Griffin, M., Fournet, A., Zhai, A. and Dianney Mascary (2023). There's Some Whores in this House: An Examination of Female Sexuality in R&B/Hip Hop and Pop Music, 1991–2021. *Sexuality & Culture*, 28. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-023-10136-5.

Guan, G., Qu, B. and Zhou, D. (2023). *Proceedings of the 2022 3rd International Conference on Big Data and Social Sciences (ICBDSS 2022)*. Springer Nature, pp.287–298.

GUAP Magazine (2023). *The Best British Streetwear Brands Of 2022 - GUAP*. [online] guap.co. Available at: https://guap.co/the-best-british-streetwear-brands-of-2022/.

GUAP Magazine (2023). *Pharrell brings the stars out for his Louis Vuitton debut*. [online] guap.co. Available at: https://guap.co/pharrell-brings-the-stars-out-for-his-louis-vuitton-debut/ [Accessed 4 Feb. 2024].

Halbal, J. (2018). Keeping It Real: Narratives of Authenticity in Rap and Luxury Brands.

Hale (1998). *Griots and Griottes*. Indiana University Press.

Hall, S. (1993). What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?. *Social Justice*, [online] 20(1/2 (51-52)), pp.104–114. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/29766735.

Hall, B., Khan, R. and Eslea, M. (2022). Criminalising Black Trauma: Grime and Drill Lyrics as a Form of Ethnographic Data to Understand 'Gangs' and Serious Youth Violence. *Genealogy*, [online] 7(1), p.2. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy7010002.

Hall, C. (2020). The Slavery Business and the Making of 'Race' in Britain and the Caribbean. *Current Anthropology*, 61(22), p.S000-S000. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/709845.

Hall, S. (1990). *Cultural identity and diaspora*.

Hall, S. (2018). *Essential Essays (Two-Volume Set): Foundations of Cultural Studies and Identity and Diaspora.* Duke University Press, pp.222–237.

Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (1976). *Resistance through rituals: youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. London; New York: Routledge, p.10.

Hall, S., Roberts, B., Clarke, J., Jefferson, T. and Critcher, C. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order*. Houndmills (Hampshire, Inglaterra): Macmillan Education.

Hallsworth, S. and Young, T. (2008). Gang talk and gang talkers: A critique. *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, [online] 4(2), pp.175–195. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659008092327.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge.

Hancox, D. (2018). *Inner city pressure: the story of grime*. London: William Collins.

Harper, P.T.H., Rhodes, W.A., Thomas, D.E., Leary, G. and Quinton, Esq., S.L. (2007). Hip-Hop Development™ Bridging the Generational Divide for Youth Development. *Journal of Youth Development*, 2(2), pp.42–55. doi:https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2007.345.

Harris, C. (2020). *Mansa Musa I of Mali: Gold, Salt, and Storytelling in Medieval West Africa*. [online] University of Oxford. Available at: https://globalcapitalism.history.ox.ac.uk/files/ghocmansamusainmalipdf.

Harrison (2009). *Hip hop underground: the integrity and ethics of racial identification*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heath, T. and Arroyo, P. (2014). 'I gracefully grab a pen and embrace it ': Hip-hop lyrics as a means for re-authoring and therapeutic change. *THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NARRATIVE THERAPY AND COMMUNITY WORK*, 3.

Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.

Heblich, S., Redding, S.J. and Voth, H.-J. (2022). Slavery and the British Industrial Revolution. *SSRN Electronic Journal - Princeton University*. doi:https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4216236.

Heidi Safia Mirza (2004). *Black British feminism: a reader*. London: Routledge, Pr.

Hellie, R. (2018). Slavery - Sociology. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. [online] Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/slavery-sociology.

Henry, W. 'Lez' (2012). Reggae, Rasta and the Role of the Deejay in the Black British Experience. *Contemporary British History*, 26(3), pp.355–373. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2012.703024.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2013). *Why music matters*. Chichester, West Sussex, Uk Malden, Ma, Usa John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Hester, N. and Gray, K. (2018). For Black men, being tall increases threat stereotyping and police stops. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, [online] 115(11), pp.2711–2715. doi:https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1714454115.

Hester, N. and Hehman, E. (2023). Dress is a Fundamental Component of Person Perception. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 27(4), p.108886832311579. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683231157961.

Heymann, A. (2023). *Fashion expert reflects on how Black designers, models and musicians have influenced the way the world sees and wears clothing*. [online] VCU News. Available at: https://news.vcu.edu/article/2023/02/how-black-designers-models-and-musicians-have-influenced-fashion.

Hill, M.E. (2022). Do the Marriageable Men want to Protect and Provide? The Expectation of Black Professional Hybrid Masculinity. *Gender & Society*, 36(4), pp.498–524. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432221102145.

Hofmeester, K. and Bernd-Stefan Grewe (2016). *Luxury in global perspective: objects and practices, 1600-2000*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.138.

Hollander, A. (2016). *Sex and suits : the evolution of modern dress*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Holden, S. (2021). *Skepta's manager Grace Ladoja: I was once afraid of the music industry*. [online] BBC News. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-59388222 [Accessed 29 Aug. 2024].

Holl, A., Guan, G. and Chen, J. (2022). *Proceedings of the 2022 5th International Conference on Humanities Education and Social Sciences (ICHESS 2022)*. Springer Nature. p.1259.

Homecoming (n.d.). *About — Homecoming Festival*. [online] ourhomecoming.com. Available at: https://ourhomecoming.com/About [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

hooks, bell (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, bell (1995). *Art On My Mind: Visual Politics*. New York: New Press.

hooks, B. (2003). *We real cool: black men and masculinity.* Taylor & Francis Group, p.51.

Huang, S. (2020). *The New Face of High-End Consumption: How Millennials and Generation Z Are Stimulating Growth in the Luxury Goods Market*. [online] McGill Business Review. Available at: https://mcgillbusinessreview.com/articles/the-new-face-of-high-end-consumption-how-millennials-and-generation-z-are-stimulating-growth-in-the-luxury-goods-market.

Huggard, E., Lonergan, P. and Overdiek, A. (2022). New Luxury Ideologies: A Shift From Building Cultural to Social Capital. *Fashion Theory*, 27(4), pp.1–25. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704x.2022.2117008.

Hunter, M. (2011). Shake it, Baby, Shake it: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip-Hop. *Sociological Perspectives*, 54(1), pp.15–36. doi:https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2011.54.1.15.

Hunter, M.A. (2010). The Nightly Round: Space, Social Capital, and Urban Black Nightlife. *City & Community*, [online] 9(2), pp.165–186. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2010.01320.x.

Hutchinson, K. (2017). *Boy Better Know: 'We should have been playing big festivals six years ago'*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/jun/22/boy-better-know-we-should-have-been-playing-big-festivals-six-years-ago.

Hypebeast (2018). *How Luxury Italian Fashion Became the Face of British Rave Culture*. [online] HYPEBEAST. Available at: https://hypebeast.com/2018/1/versace-moschino-uk-garage-rave-culture-super-sharp-exhibition.

Hypebeast (2022). *U.K. Rap and Fashion Are at One*. [online] Hypebeast. Available at: https://hypebeast.com/2022/9/uk-rap-london-fashion-week-feature-aj-tracey-backroad-gee.

Igboin, B. (2011). Colonialism and African cultural values. *African Journal of History and Culture*, [online] 3(6), pp.96–103. Available at: https://academicjournals.org/article/article1381858600_Igboin.pdf/1000.

Ikediugwu, O.A. (2019). *African Journals Online (AJOL)*. [online] Ajol.info. Available at: https://www.ajol.info.

Ilan, D.J. (2020). *Drill music offers a viable escape for urban youths – study shows that criminalising it does more harm than good | City, University of London*. [online] www.city.ac.uk. Available at: https://www.city.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/05/drill-music-offers-a-viable-escape-for-urban-youths-study-shows-that-criminalising-it-does-more-harm-than-good#:~:text=harm%20than%20good-.

Ilan, J. (2020). Digital Street Culture Decoded: Why Criminalizing Drill Music Is Street Illiterate and Counterproductive. *British Journal of Criminology*, 60(4). doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azz086.

Ilmi, A. (2011). The White Gaze vs. the Black Soul. *Race, Gender & Class*, [online] 18(3/4), pp.217–229. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/43496844.

Instagram (2018). *Skepta*. [online] Instagram.com. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/skeptagram/?hl=en.

Instagram (n.d.). *👑DON👑 V-IV (@stefflondon) • Instagram photos and videos*. [online] www.instagram.com. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/stefflondon/?hl=en [Accessed 13 Feb. 2023].

Instagram (n.d.). *BIG BANKS 👑 (@msbanks) • Instagram photos and videos*. [online] www.instagram.com. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/msbanks/?hl=en [Accessed 13 Feb. 2023].

Iqani and Dosekun (2019). *African luxury: aesthetics and politics*. Bristol; Chicago: Intellect.

J. Patrick Williams and Schwarz, K.C. (2020). *Studies on the Social Construction of Identity and Authenticity*. Routledge.

Jackson (2019). *White Negroes: When Cornrows Were in Vogue and Other Thoughts on Cultural Appropriation.* Beacon Press.

Jackson, J.V. and Cothran, M.E. (2003). Black versus Black: The Relationships among African, African American, and African Caribbean Persons. *Journal of Black Studies*, [online] 33(5), pp.576–604. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3180977.

Jacobson, G. (2009). *Realness and Hoodness: Authenticity in Hip Hop as Discussed by Adolescent Fans*. [online] Available at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3026&context=etd.

James, K. (2023). 'This is America': repurposing the white gaze through imitation. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 110(1), pp.7–26. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2023.2260565.

Jansson-Boyd, C.V. and Zawisza, M.J. (2016). *Routledge international handbook of consumer psychology*. New York: Routledge, p.219.

Jerrome, D. (1978). Migrants or Settlers? the Ibo in London. *Africa*, 48(4), pp.368–379. doi:https://doi.org/10.2307/1158802.

Johnson, M.S. (2013). *STRENGTH AND RESPECTABILITY: Black Women's Negotiation of Racialized Gender Ideals and the Role of Daughter-Father Relationships*. [online] www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org. Available at: https://www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/stable/43669842 [Accessed 17 Aug. 2023].

Jongman-Sereno, K.P. and Leary, M.R. (2019). The Enigma of Being Yourself: A Critical Examination of the Concept of Authenticity. *Review of General Psychology*, 23(1), pp.133–142. doi:https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000157.

Jopling, K. (2020). *What measures an artist's success in today's music industry?* [online] MIDiA Research. Available at: https://www.midiaresearch.com/blog/what-measures-an-artists-success-in-todays-music-industry.

Joshi, T. (2022). *Skepta: Living And Breathing Art*. [online] Sothebys.com. Available at: https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/skepta-living-and-breathing-art [Accessed 4 Feb. 2024].

Jugder, N. (2016). The thematic analysis of interview data: an approach used to examine the influence of the market on curricular provision in Mongolian higher education institutions. *The thematic analysis of interview data: an approach used to examine the influence of the market on curricular provision in Mongolian higher education institutions*, [online] 3. Available at: https://hpp.education.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/131/2016/02/HPP2016-3-Jugder.pdf.

K, A.J. (2015). *Fashion Forecasting*. Akhil JK.

Kalbaska, Sádaba, T., Cominelli, F. and Cantoni, L. (2019). *Fashion communication in the digital age: FACTUM 19 Fashion Communication Conference, Ascona, Switzerland, July 21-26, 2019*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, pp.227–237.

Kanter (2024). *Why Designer Brand's Keep the Middle Class in Poverty: The Marketing and Economics Behind it – Michigan Journal of Economics*. [online] Michigan Journal of Economics. Available at: https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mje/2024/05/07/why-designer-brand-keep-the-middle-class-in-poverty-the-marketing-and-economics-behind-it/.

Kapferer, J.-N. (2016). *Pursuing the Concept of Luxury A cross-country comparison and segmentation of luxury buyers' perception of luxury*. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jean-Noel-Kapferer/publication/317688463_Pursuing_the_Concept_of_Luxury_A_cross-country_comparison_and_segmentation_of_luxury_buyers'_perception_of_luxury/links/59490de0a6fdcc70635e533c/Pursuing-the-Concept-of-Luxury-A-cross-country-comparison-and-segmentation-of-luxury-buyers-perception-of-luxury.pdf.

Kaur, J. and Gupta, A. (2023). An Empirical Study on Consumer Buying- Behaviour towards Athleisure. [online] 12(1&2). Available at: https://iisjoa.org/sites/default/files/iisjoa/July%20-%20August%202023/39th%20Paper.pdf.

Keith, J. (2023). *Complex UK Crowns Skepta The 'Best British Rapper Of All Time'*. [online] Complex. Available at: https://www.complex.com/music/a/james-keith/skepta-named-best-uk-rapper-of-all-time [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Kelly, L. (2016). *'You Don't Have to Claim Her': RECONSTRUCTING BLACK FEMININITY THROUGH CRITICAL HIP-HOP LITERACY*. [online] www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org. Available at: https://www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/stable/44011308 [Accessed 15 May 2023].

Kelso, R. (1925). Sixteenth Century Definitions of the Gentleman in England. *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, [online] 24(3), pp.370–382. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27702882.

Kennetta Hammond Perry (2016). *London is the Place for Me*. Oxford University Press.

Khan Academy (n.d.). *Intergenerational and intragenerational mobility social mobility (video)*. [online] Khan Academy. Available at: https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/mcat/social-inequality/social-class/v/intergenerational-and-intragenerational-mobility-social-mobility.

Keyes (2004). *Rap music and street consciousness*. Urbana: University Of Illinois Press.

Khazbak, R. (2021). *'They've come into our area and they're tryna make us feel like we don't belong here' : Young people's wellbeing and mixed income social housing regeneration*. [online] Available at: https://etheses.lse.ac.uk/4383/1/Khazbak__They-have-come-our-area-young-people.pdf.

Khurana, P. (2007). *Introduction to Fashion Technology*. Firewall Media.

Kilian, A., Fellows, T.K., Giroux, R., Pennington, J., Kuper, A., Whitehead, C.R. and Richardson, L. (2019). Exploring the approaches of non-Indigenous researchers to Indigenous research: a qualitative study. *CMAJ Open*, [online] 7(3), pp. 504–509. doi:https://doi.org/10.9778/cmajo.20180204.

Kim, H.-K. (2010). A Study on the Club Fashion Styles for Designing Clubber Fashion - Focusing on the Hongdae and Kangnam Club Areas. *The Research Journal of the Costume Culture*, 18(4).

King, N. and Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. SAGE.

Kirkland, D.E. and Jackson, A. (2009). 'We Real Cool': Toward a Theory of Black Masculine Literacies. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44(3), pp.278–297. doi:https://doi.org/10.1598/rrq.44.3.3.

Kiss FM (n.d.). *UK Rap & Drill - Music Genres*. [online] kissfm.co.uk. Available at: https://kissfm.co.uk/rap-drill [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Kithinji, M. and Anyanwu, O. (2020). *Africana World in Perspective*. Kendall Hunt, pp.195–214.

Kitwana (2002). *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture*. Civitas Books.

Kitwana (2006). *Why white kids love hip-hop: wankstas, wiggers, wannabes, and the new reality of race in America*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.

Knaller (2014). *The Aesthetics of Authenticity Medial Constructions of the Real - Authenticity and Non-normative concepts in modern & contemporary poetics*. Bielefeld Transcript Verlag.

Ko, E., Costello, J.P. and Taylor, C.R. (2019). What is a Luxury Brand? A New Definition and Review of the Literature. *Journal of Business Research*, [online] 99(1), pp.405–413. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.08.023.

Kosinski, H. (2023). *The Sound of (UK) Music*. [online] Luminate. Available at: https://luminatedata.com/blog/the-sound-of-uk-music/.

Krause-Wahl, A. (2021). Fashion Stylists: History, Meaning and Practice, Ane Lynge-Jorlén (ed.) (2020). *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 8(1), pp.144–146. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/infs_00042_5.

Krims (2000). *Rap music and the poetics of identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kurtin, K.S., O'Brien, N.F., Roy, D. and Dam, L. (2019). Parasocial Relationships with Musicians. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, [online] 8(2), pp.30–50. Available at: https://thejsms.org/index.php/JSMS/article/view/502/305.

Kwass, M. (2022). *The Luxury Debate - The Consumer Revolution, 1650–1800*. [online] Cambridge University Press. Available at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/consumer-revolution-16501800/luxury-debate/F240450F5189A697BD7630CFD56EE41E [Accessed 26 Feb. 2023].

Lapierre, N. (2022). place des Noirs dans la société française des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles. *Spectrum*, (9). doi:https://doi.org/10.29173/spectrum173.

Lashua, B., Spracklen, K. and Wagg, S. (2014). *Sounds and the City*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Laurison, D., Dow, D. and Chernoff, C. (2020). Class Mobility and Reproduction for Black and White Adults in the United States: A Visualization. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 6. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120960959.

Law, R. (2015). THE 'GOLDEN AGE' IN THE HISTORY OF THE PRE-COLONIAL GOLD COAST: THE ERA OF GOLD EXPORTS (15th TO 17th CENTURIES) RE-EXAMINED. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, [online] 17(17), pp.109–136. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26512472.

Lawrence, J. (2020). *A Brief History of Trends That Originated From Black Communities* -. [online] BRICKS Magazine. Available at: https://bricksmagazine.co.uk/2020/06/29/black-culture-in-fashion-a-brief-history-of-trends-that-originated-from-black-communities/.

Lawrence, S. and Hylton, K. (2022). Critical Race Theory, Methodology, and Semiotics: The Analytical Utility of a 'Race' Conscious Approach for Visual Qualitative Research. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 22(3), p.153270862210818. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086221081829.

Leaney, S. (2019). The Council Estate and 'Being Placed': Everyday Resistances to the Stigmatization of Community. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 37(4), pp.1–17. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2019.1624387.

Lee, J.E., Hur, S. and Watkins, B. (2018). Visual communication of luxury fashion brands on social media: effects of visual complexity and brand familiarity. *Journal of Brand Management*, 25(5), pp.449–462. doi:https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0092-6.

Leitch, L. (2023). *British music artist Skepta revives Mains fashion brand*. [online] Vogue Business. Available at: https://www.voguebusiness.com/fashion/british-rapper-skepta-revives-mains-fashion-brand [Accessed 4 Aug. 2023].

Lemoine, A. (2018). *drip*. [online] Everything After Z by Dictionary.com. Available at: https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/drip/.

Lewis, V.D. (2003). Dilemmas in African Diaspora Fashion. *Fashion Theory*, 7(2), pp.163–190. doi:https://doi.org/10.2752/136270403778052113.

Lewis, P.D. (2021). *Music shapes our understanding of inequality | Research for the World | LSE Research*. [online] www.lse.ac.uk. Available at: https://www.lse.ac.uk/research/research-for-the-world/society/can-music-shape-our-understanding-of-poverty-and-inequality.

Lezama, N. (2019). Status, Votive Luxury, and Labour: The Female Rapper's Delight. *Fashion Studies*, 1(2), pp.1–23. doi:https://doi.org/10.38055/fs010202.

Lichy, J. (2021). *Post-COVID-19 Perspectives on International Business*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Lin, Z. and Zhao, Y. (2022). Localization and mainstream emergence of hip-hop music in China: a critical transculturalism perspective. *Media, Culture & Society*, 44(3), p.016344372210771. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221077160.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Evaluation Practice*, 15(2), pp.179–192. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/0886-1633(94)90008-6.

Lipovetsky (2002). *The empire of fashion: dressing modern democracy*. Princeton, N.J. ; Woodstock: Princeton University Press.

Lojacono, G. and Ru, L. (2021). *Resilience of Luxury Companies in Times of Change*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.

Longhi, S. and Brynin, M. (2017). *The ethnicity pay gap*. [online] pp.9, 10. Available at: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-108-the-ethnicity-pay-gap.pdf.

Loury, G.C., Tariq Modood and Teles, S.M. (2005). *Ethnicity, Social Mobility, and Public Policy*. Cambridge University Press.

Low, J. (2022). *Everything You Need To Know About Supreme*. [online] LUXUO. Available at: https://www.luxuo.com/style/fashion/everything-you-need-to-know-about-supreme.html.

Lundberg, G.J.W., Neel, R., Lassetter, B. and Todd, A.R. (2018). Racial bias in implicit danger associations generalizes to older male targets. *PLOS ONE*, 13(6), p.e0197398. doi:https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0197398.

Lurie, A. (1981). *Language of clothes.* New York Vintage.

Lurie, A. (1983). *The Language of Clothes*. Vintage.

Luxury Lifestyle Magazine (2023). *Why the luxury world is embracing 'buy now, pay later' payment in 2023 | Luxury Lifestyle Magazine*. [online] Luxury Lifestyle Magazine. Available at: https://www.luxurylifestylemag.co.uk/money/why-the-luxury-world-is-embracing-buy-now-pay-later-payment-in-2023/.

Lynch, J. (2022). *U.K. Rap and Fashion Are at One*. [online] Hypebeast. Available at: https://hypebeast.com/2022/9/uk-rap-london-fashion-week-feature-aj-tracey-backroad-gee.

Lynge-Jorlén, A. (2016). Editorial Styling: Between Creative Solutions and Economic Restrictions. *Fashion Practice*, 8(1), pp.85–97. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2016.1147697.

Lynge-Jorlén (2020). *Fashion stylists: history, meaning and practice*. London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, An Imprint Of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Macmillan, L. and Mcknight, A. (2022). *Understanding recent patterns in intergenerational social mobility: differences by gender, ethnicity, education, and their intersections*. [online] Available at: https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spdo/spdorp11.pdf.

Mahon, M.E. (2020). *Black diamond queens : African American women and rock and roll*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Makkapati, N. (2019). *A Brief Guide to British Rap | The Daily Nexus*. [online] The Daily Nexus | The University of California, Santa Barbara's independent, student-run newspaper. Available at: https://dailynexus.com/2019-05-30/a-brief-guide-to-british-rap/.

Makovicky, N., Jörg Wiegratz and Dimitra Kofti (2023). The Moral Matrix of Capitalism: Insights from Central and Eastern Europe. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 38(1), pp.264–282. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/08883254231196255.

Malik, S. (2002). *Representing black Britain [electronic resource]*. London, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Malisa, M. and Nhengeze, P. (2018). Pan-Africanism: A Quest for Liberation and the Pursuit of a United Africa. *Genealogy*, 2(3), p.28. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy2030028.

Manela, E. and Streets-Salter, H. (2023). *The Anticolonial Transnational*. Cambridge University Press, pp.135–161.

Manlow, V. (2009). 'Artilisation' of Luxury Stores, In Fashion and Imagination About Clothes and Art. Jan Brand and José Teunissen, Editors. Arnhem: ArtEZ, pp. 154-167. Translations in Dutch and Spanish."

Mansa Srivastava (2023). *The Role of Fashion in Self-Expression and Identity*. [online] www.fibre2fashion.com. Available at: https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/9713/the-role-of-fashion-in-self-expression-and-identity [Accessed 17 Jul. 2023].

Manstead, A.S.R. (2018). The Psychology of Social class: How Socioeconomic Status Impacts thought, feelings, and Behaviour. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 57(2), pp.267–291. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12251.

Marcellus William Andrews (2001). *The Political Economy of Hope and Fear*. NYU Press.

Marcia Texler Segal and Demos, V.P. (2005). *Gender realities: local and global*. Amsterdam, Netherlands; San Diego, Ca; Oxford England: Elsevier Jai.

Marroncelli, R. (2024). *The Emotional Durability of Fast Fashion: Male and Female Perspectives*. [online] Available at: https://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/51249/1/Rose%20Marroncelli%202024%20PhD%20excl3rdpartycopyright%20images%20removed.pdf.

Marshall (1997). *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. U of Minnesota Press.

Marshall (2014). *Celebrity and power: fame in contemporary culture; with a new introduction*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.

Marshall, A. (2011). Reclaiming the Erotic Power of Black Women. *Social and Economic Studies*, [online] 60(1), pp.61–90. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41635292.

Martinez, T.A. (1997). *Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance*. [online] www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org. Available at: https://www-jstor-org.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/stable/1389525 [Accessed 2 Jul. 2023].

Mast, J.F. and McAndrew, F.T. (2011). Violent Lyrics in Heavy Metal Music Can Increase Aggression in Males . *North American Journal of Psychology*, 13(1), pp.63–64.

Matera, M. (2015). *Black London: the imperial metropolis and decolonization in the twentieth century*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Matsumoto, D.R. and Hwang, H.S. (2019). *The handbook of culture and psychology*. New York, Ny: Oxford University Press, pp.235–291.

Mazama (2003). *The Afrocentric paradigm*. Trenton, Nj: Africa World Press.

Mazzoni, C. (2017). *Timeless Icons*. Rizzoli Publications.

Mbembe, A. (2017). *Critique of Black Reason*. Translated by L. Dubois. Duke University Press.

McAllister, A. (2023). *Tracking the Hierarchy of Luxury: Exploring the complex relationship between luxury brands and social status*. [online] www.coohom.com. Available at: https://www.coohom.com/article/tracking-the-hierarchy-of-luxury.

McAssey, J., Benson, S. and Buckley, C. (2021). *Fashion Styling*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), pp.310–321.

McCracken, G.D. (1988). *Culture and consumption: new approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities*. Bloomington, Ind. Indiana Univ. Press.

McGinty, D.E. (1993). Black Scholars on Black Music: The Past, the Present, and the Future. *Black Music Research Journal*, 13(1), p.1. doi:https://doi.org/10.2307/779403.

McGowan, K. (2007). *Key issues in critical and cultural theory*. Maidenhead Open University Press.

Mckerrell, S. (2016). Social constructionism in music studies. *Popular Music*, 35(3), pp.425–428. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261143016000581.

Mckinney, J. (2021). *Virgil Abloh's History in Music*. [online] Complex. Available at: https://www.complex.com/music/a/j-mckinney/virgil-abloh-music-history.

Mclean, K.C. and Syed, M. (2016). *The Oxford handbook of identity development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McMillan, C. (2022). 'Who run the world?' Gender and the social network of R&B/hip hop collaboration from 2012 to 2020. *Applied Network Science*, 7(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s41109-022-00485-9.

McMillan, M. (2017). Saga Bwoys, Rude Bwoys, and Saggers: Rebellious Black Masculinities. *Critical Arts*, 31(3), pp.72–89. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2017.1383492.

McQuaid, I. (2016). *Skepta on grime: 'People are catching on. There's a revolution happening'*. [online] The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/global/2016/sep/10/skepta-konnichiwa-boy-better-know-mercurys.

Meinecke, C., Hakimi, A.D. and Jänicke, S. (2021). Explorative Visual Analysis of Rap Music. *Information*, 13(1), p.10. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/info13010010.

Mercer, J. and McGlashan, M. (2023). *Toxic Masculinity*. Taylor & Francis.

Merton, R.K. (1938). *Social Structure and Anomie*. Irvington Publishers, pp.672–682.

Metallic Inc (n.d.). *About — Metallic Inc.* [online] metallicinc.com. Available at: https://metallicinc.com/About [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Metcalfe, T. and Ruth, N. (2020). Beamer, Benz, or Bentley: Mentions of products in hip hop and R&B music. *International Journal of Music Business Research*, 9(1), pp.41–62.

Meyers, E. (2009). '"Can You Handle My Truth?"': Authenticity and the Celebrity Star Image. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 42(5), pp.890–892.

Mhoon, A.L. (2004). Dressing For Freedom. *Black History Bulletin*, [online] 67(1/4), pp.26–29. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/44214654.

Mida, I. (2021). *Reading fashion in art*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

Mignolo, W. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mikkonen, I., Vicdan, H. and Markkula, A. (2013). What not to wear? Oppositional ideology, fashion, and governmentality in wardrobe self-help. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 17(3), pp.254–273. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2013.778174.

Miller, J. (2011). *Fashion and Music*. Berg.

Miller, M.L. (2009). *Slaves to fashion: black dandyism and the styling of black diasporic identity*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.

Miller, W.B. (1958). Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency. *Journal of Social Issues*, 14(3), pp.5–19. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1958.tb01413.x.

Mitchell, T. (2001). *Global noise : rap and hip-hop outside the USA*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.

Mohammed-Akinyela, I. (n.d.). *Conscious Rap Music: Movement Music Revisited A Qualitative Conscious Rap Music: Movement Music Revisited A Qualitative Study of Conscious Rappers and Activism Study of Conscious Rappers and Activism*. [online] Available at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1010&context=aas_theses.

Mohan, G. and Zack-Williams, A.B. (2002). Globalisation from below: conceptualising the role of the African diasporas in africa's development. *Review of African Political Economy*, 29(92), pp.211–236. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/03056240208704610.

Mojtahed, R., Nunes, M.B., Martins, J.T. and Peng, A. (2014). Equipping the constructivist researcher: The combined use of semi-structured interviews and decision-making maps. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 12(2).

Moody-Ramirez, M. and Scott, L.M. (n.d.). Rap Music Literacy: A Case Study of Millennial Audience Reception to Rap Lyrics Depicting Independent Women. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, [online] 7(3), pp.54–72. Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1088586.pdf.

Moran, J. (2022). Delivering the Undeliverable: Teaching English in a University Today. *English: Journal of the English Association*, 71(273), pp.140–160. doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/english/efac006.

Moreno, A.M. (2021). *HYPEBEAST FASHION: WHY STREETWEAR IS THE NEW LUXURY FASHION*. [Dissertation] Available at: https://www.proquest.com/docview/2533362103?accountid=14178&parentSessionId=XVgDgka4omclak5lWySywdvYMFbOnQRIJoCfhSQgpyY%3D&pq-origsite=summon.

Morgan, M. (2009). *The Real Hiphop Battling for Knowledge, Power, and Respect in the LA Underground*. Duke University Press.

Morris, K. (2021). *Shaybo: Queen of the South review – the Lewisham rapper shows a soft side*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/aug/22/shaybo-queen-of-the-south-review-lewisham-rapper [Accessed 28 Aug. 2024].

Moschilla, M.R. (2023). *'I remake my universe everytime I use a verse': Rap music and the changing same of anti-racist struggle in 21st century America*.

Mozie, D. (2022). 'They Killin' Us for No Reason': Black Lives Matter, Police Brutality, and Hip-Hop Music—A Quantitative Content Analysis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 99(3), p.107769902211098. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990221109803.

Mulligan, R. (2008). Globalization & American Popular Culture. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 41(4), pp.730–732. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2008.00544_11.x.

Mutegi, J., Pitts Bannister, V., Nichols, B., Priester, D., Murdoch, Y. and Richardson, L. (2014). Tales from the Mic: A Content Analysis of 10 Years of Hip-Hop Lyrics. *African American Learners, Journal of ISAAC*, 3(1).

Nagar, K. (2021). Priming effect of celebrities on consumer response toward endorsed brands: an experimental investigation. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 38(6), pp.679–691. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/jcm-06-2020-3921.

Nanda, S. (2019). Re-Framing Hottentot: Liberating Black Female Sexuality from the Mammy/Hottentot Bind. *Humanities*, 8(4), p.161. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/h8040161.

Nast, C. (2023). *Naomi, Stormzy And Louis Theroux Sit On The Front Row At Skepta's London Fashion Week Show*. [online] British Vogue. Available at: https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/skepta-naomi-stormzy-fashion-week-mains [Accessed 17 Sep. 2023].

National Geographic Society (2022). *Mansa Musa (Musa I of Mali) | National Geographic Society*. [online] education.nationalgeographic.org. Available at: https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/mansa-musa-musa-i-mali/.

National Museum of African American History and Culture (2019). *Black is Beautiful: The Emergence of Black Culture and Identity in the 60s and 70s | National Museum of African American History and Culture*. [online] nmaahc.si.edu. Available at: https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/black-beautiful-emergence-black-culture-and-identity-60s-and-70s.

Nations, U. (n.d.). *People of African Descent*. [online] United Nations. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/vulnerable-groups/people-of-african-descent.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. (2015). Decoloniality in Africa: A continuing search for a new world order. *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 36(2), p.22.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. (2018). *Epistemic freedom in Africa: deprovincialization and decolonization*. London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Neal (2013). *What the Music Said*. Routledge.

Negus, K. (1999). THE MUSIC BUSINESS AND RAP: BETWEEN THE STREET AND THE EXECUTIVE SUITE. *Cultural Studies*, 13(3), pp.488–508. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/095023899335194.

Nelson, A. (2009). *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present): The Repertoire of Black Popular Culture*. [online] www.americanpopularculture.com. Available at: https://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/spring_2009/nelson.htm [Accessed 26 Feb. 2023].

New Wave Magazine (2023). *Dave & Central Cee Solidify Their Dominance In UK Rap With 'Split Decision' [Review]*. [online] www.newwavemagazine.com. Available at: https://www.newwavemagazine.com/single-post/dave-central-cee-solidify-their-dominance-in-uk-rap-with-split-decision-review [Accessed 4 Feb. 2024].

Newbold, A. (2019). *1 Night, 2 Gucci Suits: Little Simz Is Alessandro Michele's New Poster Girl*. [online] British Vogue. Available at: https://www.vogue.co.uk/news/article/little-simz-gucci [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Nelissen and Meijers (2011). Social benefits of luxury brands as costly signals of wealth and status. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, [online] 32(5), pp.343–355. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2010.12.002.

Nguyen, C.V. and Nguyen, L.T. (2019). Intra-generational and Intergenerational Social Mobility: Evidence from Vietnam. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 55(3), pp.370–397. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619876320.

Nikkhah and Wheeler, C. (2020). *End of the word 'empire' is nigh in honours overhaul*. [online] The times. Available at: https://www.thetimes.com/article/end-of-the-word-empire-is-nigh-in-honours-overhaul-nf0dqnpgs [Accessed 14 Aug. 2024].

Nkrumah (1963). *Africa must unite*. London: Heinemann,, C.

Notion Magazine (2023). *Burberry Launch a New Campaign Starring Shygirl & Skepta*. [online] Notion. Available at: https://notion.online/burberry-launch-a-new-campaign-starring-shygirl-and-skepta/.

Nwosu, C. (2019). The African Diaspora Studies: Concept, Growth and Challenges. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, [online] 28, pp.212–233. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/48618996 [Accessed 15 Jul. 2023].

Nyika, L. and Murray-Orr, A. (2017). Critical race theory–social constructivist bricolage: A health-promoting schools research methodology. *Health Education Journal*, 76(4), pp.432–441. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0017896916689108.

O'Brian, C. (1990). Family therapy with black families. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 12(1), pp.3–16. doi:https://doi.org/10.1046/j..1990.00366.x.

O'Callaghan, C., Barry, P. and Thompson, K. (2011). Music's relevance for adolescents and young adults with cancer: a constructivist research approach. *Supportive Care in Cancer*, 20(4), pp.687–697. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-011-1104-1.

O' Donnell, K. (2000). A Theory on the Origins of Coolness . *A Journal:Advances in consumer research*, 27.

O', Donnell, K.A. and Wardlow, D.L. (2000). A Theory on the Origins of Coolness. *ACR North American Advances*, [online] NA-27. Available at:

https://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/8351/volumes/v27/NA-27#:~:text=peer%2Dgroup%20affiliation.- [Accessed 5 Jun. 2023].

OECD (2006). 'Intergenerational Mobility', in Society at a Glance 2006: OECD Social Indicators. *SOCIETY AT A GLANCE: OECD SOCIAL INDICATORS*. [online] doi:https://doi.org/10.1787/618651183876.

Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2011). *2011 Census: Ethnic group, local authorities in the United Kingdom*. [Online] Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/

Ogbar, J. (2007). *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap*. University Press of Kansas.

Okonkwo, U. (2007). *Luxury Fashion Branding: trends, tactics, techniques.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Okpewho, I. (1981). Cheikh Anta Diop: The Search for a Philosophy of African Culture. *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 21(84), pp.587–602. doi:https://doi.org/10.3406/cea.1981.2292.

Oloruntoba (2023). (Re)Negotiating Existence: Pan-Africanism and the Role of African Union in a Changing Global Order. *Global studies quarterly*, [online] 3(3). doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksad045.

Olusoga, D. (2016). *Black and British*. London: Macmillan.

Olusoga, D. (2016). *The reality of being black in today's Britain*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/30/what-it-means-to-be-black-in-britain-today.

Orencia, A.J. (2023). *Authenticity, Relatability, and Cultural Influences in Contemporary Marketing Strategies: A Qualitative Inquiry*. [online] Ssrn.com. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4675302.

Osumare (2008). *The Africanist aesthetic in global hip-hop: power moves*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ott, M. and Babacar Mbaye Diop (2023). *Decolonial Aesthetics I*. J.B. Metzler.

Oware, M. (2018). *I Got Something to Say: Gender, Race, and Social Consciousness in Rap Music*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Oware, M. (2018). Content Analysis of Underground Rap Artists' Lyrics. *Sage Research Methods Cases Part 2*. doi:https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526439345.

Owen, J.E., Berenbaum, S.A. and Liben, L.S. (2012). *Gender Development*. Psychology Press.

Owyong, Y.S.M. (2009). Clothing semiotics and the social construction of power relations. *Social Semiotics*, [online] 19(2), pp.191–211. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330902816434.

ÖzdilM.A. (2021). THE EFFECT OF CLOTHING AS A MARKER ON IDENTITY. *Motif Akademi Halkbilimi Dergisi*, [online] 14(33), pp.117–130. doi:https://doi.org/10.12981/mahder.867867.

Ozuem, W. and Yllka Azemi (2018). *Digital marketing strategies for fashion and luxury brands*. Hershey, Pa: Igi Global, Business Science Reference (An Imprint Of Igi Global).

Paige, J.W. (2022). *Examining the Loss of Wealth and Downward Mobility of African Americans: A Review of Challenges for the Black Middle Class*. [online] www.rand.org. Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1259-3.html [Accessed 31 Jul. 2024].

Paik, H. and Lee, J.H. (2017). *A Study of the Formative Characteristics and Meaning in Contemporary Fashion Subculture Using the Greimas Semiotic Square*. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322360283_A_Study_of_the_Formative_Characteristics_and_Meaning_in_Contemporary_Fashion_Subculture_Using_the_Greimas_Semiotic_Square.

Palmer, C.A. (2018). Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 11(2), pp.214–220. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/jnhv85n1-2p27.

Pamela Church Gibson (2013). *Fashion and Celebrity Culture*. Berg.

Pantin-Sohier, Sohier, Sohier, A., Hofmann, J. and Billot, S. (2023). The impact of moderately incongruent rap music endorsers on luxury brand personality and brand coolness.

Journal of Strategic Marketing, pp.1–17. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254x.2023.2232805.

Paper Magazine (2024). *Skepta's Groundbreaking Film 'Tribal Mark' Comes to NYC*. Paper Magazine .

Parker, K. (2022). Grime, gangs and the perpetuation of stereotypes by sportswear brands in the United Kingdom. *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*, 9(1), pp.77–98. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/csmf_00052_1.

Parmar Amin, R. (2019). *How UK grime took the tracksuit to high-fashion heights - INDIE*. [online] INDIE Magazine. Available at: https://indie-mag.com/2019/01/evolution-tracksuits-grime/.

Pate, A.D. (2010). *In the heart of the beat: the poetry of rap*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000). *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Patricia Hill Collins (2004). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism*. New York Routledge.

Patrizia Calefato (2014). *Luxury: Fashion, lifestyle and excess*. A&C Black.

Patten, H. (2023). *The Windrush Dance Revolution That Transformed Britain – From Birmingham's Basements To Notting Hill Carnival*. [online] Independent Social Research Foundation. Available at: https://www.isrf.org/2023/06/08/the-windrush-dance-revolution-that-transformed-britain-from-birminghams-basements-to-notting-hill-carnival/ [Accessed 7 May 2024].

Paulicelli, E. and Clark, H. (2009). *The Fabric of Cultures*. Routledge.

Payne, A.N. (2022). Hip Hop, identity, & Black girlhood: how Black girls (re)construct racial and gender identity through Hip Hop. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 27(2), pp.1–22. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2119837.

Pearson, L. (2015). *The dA–Zed guide to British subculture*. [online] Dazed. Available at: https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/24544/1/the-da-zed-guide-to-british-subculture.

Pelau, C., Nistoreanu, P., Lazar, L. and Badescu, R. (2022). Celebrity vs. Product: A Neuroscientific Approach to the Distractors in Food Advertising for Sustainable Marketing. *Sustainability*, 14(19), p.12768. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/su141912768.

Pennycook, A. (2007). Language, Localization, and the Real: Hip-Hop and the Global Spread of Authenticity. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 6(2), pp.93–115. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/15348450701341246.

Perera, J. (2018). The politics of Generation Grime. *Race & Class*, 60(2), pp.82–93. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396818797268.

Perry, I. (2005). *Prophets of the hood : politics and poetics in hip hop*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Pfeifer, T.H. (2009). Deconstructing Cartesian Dualisms of Western Racialized Systems: A Study in the Colors Black and White . *Journal of Black Studies*, 39(4).

Pham, M.-H.T. (2017). Racial Plagiarism and Fashion. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 4(3), p.67. doi:https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.4.3.0067.

Phillip, R. (2024). *In His Debut Film 'Tribal Mark', Skepta Creates His Own 'Black James Bond'*. [online] British Vogue. Available at: https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/skepta-tribal-mark-short-film-interview [Accessed 30 Sep. 2024].

Phillips, J. (2023). *Tracksuits And Athleisurewear Have Been Co-opted By The Middle Class*. [online] Fashion Tingz. Available at: https://fashiontingz.substack.com/p/tracksuits-and-athleisurewear-have.

Phillips, T. and Phillips, M. (1998). *Windrush The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain.* Harpercollins Publishers London.

Pierre-Yves Donzé (2023). *Selling Europe to the World*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Podoshen, J.S., Andrzejewski, S.A. and Hunt, J.M. (2014). Materialism, Conspicuous Consumption, and American Hip-Hop Subculture. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 26(4), pp.271–283. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2014.900469.

Polanco-Roman, L., Danies, A. and Anglin, D.M. (2016). Racial discrimination as race-based trauma, coping strategies, and dissociative symptoms among emerging adults. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 8(5), pp.609–617. doi:https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000125.

Posel, D. and Ilana Van Wyk (2019). *Conspicuous consumption in Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Pyatak, E. and Muccitelli, L. (2011). Rap Music as Resistive Occupation: Constructions of Black American Identity and Culture for Performers and their Audiences. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 18(1), pp.48–61. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2011.554154.

Quinn, E. (2024). Racist inferences and flawed data: drill rap lyrics as criminal evidence in group prosecutions. *Race & class*, 65(4), pp.3–25. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968241234539.

Rabaka (2013). *The Hip Hop Movement*. Lexington Books.

Radano and Bohlman (2000). *Music and the racial imagination*. Chicago, Ill.: University Of Chicago Press.

Radon, A. (2012). Unintended Brand Endorsers' Impact on Luxury Brand Image. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 4(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v4n1p108.

Rahman, O. (2016). The hoodie: Consumer choice, fashion style and symbolic meaning. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 3(1), pp.111–133. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/infs.3.1.111_1.

Rambarran, S. (2018). Keepin' it on da streets? UK rap and music education. *Journal of Popular Music Education*, [online] 2(1-2), pp.165–172. Available at: https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA553906215&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=23976721&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=anon%7E64f59ecc&aty=open-web-entry [Accessed 22 Aug. 2024].

Ramsey, G.P. (2004). *Race music: black cultures from bebop to hip-hop*. Berkeley, Ca Univ. Of California Press.

Randles, C. and Burnard, P. (2022). *The Routledge Companion to Creativities in Music Education*. Taylor & Francis.

Raskin, J.D. and Bridges, S.K. (2004). *Studies in meaning 2 : bridging the personal and social constructivist psychology*. New York: Pace University Press.

Redmond, S. and Holmes, S. (2007). *Stardom and Celebrity - Fame Matters*. SAGE.

Redmond, S.L. (2013). *Anthem: social movements and the sound of solidarity in the African diaspora*. New York: NYU Press.

Reid, R. (2011). PAST AND PRESENTISM: THE 'PRECOLONIAL' AND THE FORESHORTENING OF AFRICAN HISTORY. *The Journal of African History*, 52(2), pp.135–155. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021853711000223.

Renwick, F. (2019). *How Waiting In Line Became The Biggest Fashion Trend Of The 2010s*. [online] Esquire. Available at: https://www.esquire.com/uk/style/fashion/a30292432/queue-supreme-palace-louis-vuitton-2010s-fashion/.

Reuters (2023). *South Africans call for UK to return diamonds set in crown jewels*. [online] CNN. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/05/africa/star-of-africa-diamond-intl/index.html [Accessed 17 Aug. 2024].

Rienda, L., Ruiz-FernándezL., Drylie Carey, L. and Garcia MedinaI. (2021). *Firms in the fashion industry : sustainability, luxury and communication in an international context*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rinsey Antony, V.A. and Chinnamal, Dr.S.K. (1998). *Fashion and Identity*. HOD, Chikkanna Goverment Arts College, Tirupur

Ritch, E.L., Canning, C. and McColl, J. (2023). *Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry*. Emerald Group Publishing, pp.105–114.

Rizzo, M. (2009). 'For Us, By Us': Hip-Hop Fashion, Commodity Blackness and the Culture of Emulation. *Testimonial Advertising in the American Marketplace*, pp.207–230. doi:https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230101715_9.

Robertson, Kopot, C. and Mestres, J.L. (2023). Beyond Afros and activism: Analysis of Black and African American women and fashion, style, dress and identity in fashion studies literature. *Fashion, style & popular culture*, 11(1), pp.13–26. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc_00195_1.

Rodrigues, C.S. and Rodrigues, P. (2019). Brand love matters to Millennials: the relevance of mystery, sensuality and intimacy to neo-luxury brands. Journal of Product and Brand Management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.

Rodriguez, D. (2019). *Skepta - 'Ignorance is Bliss' - Everything Is Noise*. [online] Everything Is Noise. Available at: https://everythingisnoise.net/reviews/skepta-ignorance-is-bliss/.

Roediger, D. (2017). *Class, Race, and Marxism*. Verso Books.

Rogers, T. (2020). *HIDDEN IDENTITY: A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY OF BLACK MALE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES*. [online] Available at: https://scholarworks.bellarmine.edu/tdc/79?utm_source=scholarworks.bellarmine.edu%2Ftdc%2F79&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.

Rolls Royce (2017). *SKEPTA TRANSFORMS NEW PHANTOM INTO ROLLING RECORDING STUDIO*. [online] www.press.rolls-roycemotorcars.com. Available at: https://www.press.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/rolls-royce-motor-cars-pressclub/photo/detail/P90288467/skepta-transforms-new-phantom-into-rolling-recording-studio [Accessed 4 Feb. 2024].

Romero, E. (2012). *Free stylin': how hip hop changed the fashion industry*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger.

Romm, N.R.A. (2010). *New racism: revisiting researcher accountabilities*. Dordrecht ; London: Springer.

Rose, T. (1994). *Black noise: rap music and black culture in contemporary America*. Hanover, NH: University Press Of New England.

Rose, T. (1994). *Black noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.

Rose, T. (2008). *The hip hop wars: What we talk about when we talk about hip hop*. New York: Basiccivitas.

Rosengren, S., Micael Dahlén and Shintaro Okazaki (2013). *Advances in Advertising Research (Vol. IV): The Changing Roles of Advertising*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, pp.103–114.

Rosenthal, L. and Lobel, M. (2016). Stereotypes of Black American Women Related to Sexuality and Motherhood. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, [online] 40(3), pp.414–427. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684315627459.

Roszak, T. (1969). *The Making of a Counter Culture.* Garden City, Nueva York: Anchor Books.

Roth, W.D., van Stee, E.G. and Regla-Vargas, A. (2023). Conceptualizations of Race: Essentialism and Constructivism. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-034017.

Rotimi, C.N., Tekola-Ayele, F., Baker, J.L. and Shriner, D. (2016). The African Diaspora: History, Adaptation and Health. *Current opinion in genetics & development*, [online] 41, pp.77–84. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gde.2016.08.005.

Royal Museums Greenwich (2022). *The history of the transatlantic slave trade*. [online] www.rmg.co.uk. Available at: https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/history-transatlantic-slave-trade.

Sabala and Gopal, M. (2010). Body, Gender and Sexuality: Politics of Being and Belonging. *Economic and Political Weekly*, [online] 45(17), pp.43–51. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25664384.

Sacasa and Mariduena (2023). *Shirt Kings: pioneers of hip hop fashion*. Dokument Forlag.

Sardar (1997). *Postmodernism and the other: the new imperialism of Western culture*. London; Chicago, Ill.: Pluto Press.

Savage, M. (2000). *Class analysis and social transformation*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Savić, M., Frfulanović-Šomođi, D. and Savić, R. (2020). Athleisure: Sport-style luxory. *Tekstilna industrija*, [online] 68(2), pp.29–36. doi:https://doi.org/10.5937/tekstind2002029s.

Scanlan, P.X. (2016). Blood, Money and Endless Paper: Slavery and Capital in British Imperial History. *History Compass*, 14(5), pp.218–230. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12310.

Schaefer, R.T. (2008). *Encyclopedia of race, ethnicity, and society*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, p.623.

Schmader, T. and Sedikides, C. (2017). State Authenticity as Fit to Environment: The Implications of Social Identity for Fit, Authenticity, and Self-Segregation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 22(3), pp.228–259. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868317734080.

Schmiedeberg, C. and Jette Schröder (2023). Did You Like the Interview? Interviewer Effects on Respondents' Interview Pleasantness Ratings. *Field Methods*, 36(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822x231209251.

Schutz, S.A. (2019). Grey-Washing Jim Crow: The Cultural Colonization of African-American Folk Music. *Revue LISA / LISA e-journal*, (vol. XVII-n°1). doi:https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.11015.

Schwarz, J.O. (2015). The 'Narrative Turn' in developing foresight: Assessing how cultural products can assist organisations in detecting trends. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 90(B), pp.510–513. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2014.02.024.

Sennett, R. and Cobb, J. (1972). *The hidden injuries of class.* New York: Vintage Books.

Sepehri, N. (2020). *Feminism, Misogyny, & Rap Music: A Content Analysis of Lyrics within the 'New Wave' of Female Rappers*. [online] jewlscholar.mtsu.edu. Available at: https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/items/163c5f4e-af02-4ab9-a8d6-c4c6685f65c3.

Shabazz, R. (2013). Masculinity and the mic: confronting the uneven geography of hip-hop. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 21(3), pp.370–386. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2013.781016.

Sharman, L. and Dingle, G.A. (2015). Extreme Metal Music and Anger Processing. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, [online] 9(272). doi:https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00272.

Sheringham, O., Ebbensgaard, C.L. and Blunt, A. (2021). 'Tales from other people's houses': home and dis/connection in an East London neighbourhood. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 24(5), pp.1–19. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1965197.

Shuker, R. (1994). *Understanding popular music*. London; New York: Routledge, p.172.

Shukla, N. (2021). *I turned down an MBE – I don't want an honour glorifying the British empire*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jun/14/nikesh-shukla-i-turned-down-an-mbe-i-dont-want-an-honour-glorifying-the-british-empire [Accessed 14 Aug. 2024].

Sikarskie, A. (2020). *STORYTELLING IN LUXURY FASHION: brands, visual cultures, and technologies.* S.L.: Routledge.

Sikarskie (2021). *Storytelling in luxury fashion: brands, visual cultures, and technologies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Simon Bagwell, L. and Bernheim, B.D. (1996). Veblen Effects In A Theory Of Conspicuous Consumption. *American Economic Review*.

Sims, J.D. (2011). *Smith ScholarWorks Smith ScholarWorks*. [online] Available at: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1610&context=theses.

Sklar, M., Strübel, J., Freiberg, K. and Elhabbassi, S. (2021). Beyond Subculture the Meaning of Style: Chronicling Directions of Scholarship on Dress since Hebdige and Muggleton. *Fashion Theory*, 26(6), pp.1–21. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704x.2021.1954834.

Sköld, D. and Rehn, A. (2005). Bling-Bring: The economic discourses of hip-hop. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5093377_Bling-Bring_The_economic_discourses_of_hip-hop.

Slang net (n.d.). *Sauce - What does sauce mean?* [online] slang.net. Available at: https://slang.net/meaning/sauce.

Slaven, M. (2021). The Windrush Scandal and the individualization of postcolonial immigration control in Britain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, [online] 45(16), pp.1–23. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01419870.2021.2001555.

Smalley, N. (2012). Lost In Thought: Authenticity in Rap and Literature – A Swedish Case Study. *Opticon1826*, (13), pp.33–34. doi:https://doi.org/10.5334/opt.ag.

Smith, G. (2003). The allure, magic and mystery - A brief history of diamonds. *Journal of the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy*, 103(9), pp.529–534.

Smith, H.L. (2019). Has nigga Been Reappropriated as a Term of Endearment? *American Speech*, 94(4), pp.420–477. doi:https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-7706537.

Socha, M. (2023). *Designer Matthew M. Williams Is Stepping Down at Givenchy*. [online] WWD. Available at: https://wwd.com/fashion-news/designer-luxury/givenchy-designer-matthew-williams-leaving-1235950965/ [Accessed 29 Aug. 2024].

Som, A. and Blanckaert, C. (2015). *The road to luxury: the evolution, markets, and strategies of luxury brand management*. Singapore: John Wiley & Sons.

Sound of Life (n.d.). *Conscious Rap's Origin Story: The Music & Movement Revisited*. [online] Sound of Life. Available at: https://www.soundoflife.com/blogs/mixtape/conscious-rap-origins [Accessed 9 Jan. 2023].

Speers, L. (2017). *Hip-Hop Authenticity and the London Scene*. Taylor & Francis.

Speers, L.M. (2014). *KEEPIN' IT REAL: NEGOTIATING AUTHENTICITY IN THE LONDON HIP HOP SCENE*.

Spence, L.K. (2011). *Stare in the darkness: the limits of hip-hop and Black politics*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, pp.19–54.

Sproles, G.B. (1979). *Fashion: consumer behavior toward dress*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Burgess Pub. Co.

Stanfield, J.H. and Dennis, R.M. (1993). *Race and ethnicity in research methods*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Stanford Libraries (2021). *Hypodermic Needle Theory (Magic Bullet Theory). in SearchWorks articles*. [online] searchworks.stanford.edu. Available at: https://searchworks.stanford.edu/articles/ers__129814592.

STEELO (n.d.). *About Steelo*. [online] steelostyle.com. Available at: https://www.steelostyle.com/about [Accessed 3 Jul. 2024].

Steinberg, S.R., Priya Parmar and Richard, B. (2006). *Contemporary youth culture: an international encyclopaedia. Vol.2*. Westport, Conn.; London: Greenwood.

Stitt, B. (2004). *Black British Style*. [online] Exhibiting Fashion. Available at: https://fashionexhibitionmaking.arts.ac.uk/black-british-style/.

Stokburger-Sauer, N.E. and Teichmann, K. (2013). Is luxury just a female thing? The role of gender in luxury brand consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(7), pp.889–896. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.12.007.

Stokes, M. (1994). *Ethnicity, identity and music : the musical construction of place*. Oxford: Berg.

Stormzy (2022). *STORMZY - MEL MADE ME DO IT*. [online] www.youtube.com. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2litzsFCwkA&ab_channel=Stormzy [Accessed 13 Feb. 2023].

Stuyvesant, K.E.V. (2018). *Supreme has the secret sauce for creating a cult-like following:* [online] Medium. Available at: https://medium.com/@kurtisvanstuyvesant/supreme-has-the-secret-sauce-for-creating-a-cult-like-following-241cf668ee76.

Sue-Ellen Case, Philip, B. and Susan, F. (2000). *Decomposition: post-disciplinary performance.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press Indiana University Press.

Sullivan, S. (2006). *Revealing whiteness: the unconscious habits of racial privilege*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Suyemoto, K.L., Donovan, R.A. and Kim, G.S. (2022). *Unraveling Assumptions*. Taylor & Francis.

Swain, J. and Spire, Z. (2020). The Role of Informal Conversations in Generating Data, and the Ethical and Methodological Issues They Raise. *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 21(1).

Sweeting, B. (2018). Radical Constructivism and the Decolonisation of Epistemology. *Constructivist Foundations*, [online] 13(3), pp.326–327. Available at: https://constructivist.info/13/3/326.sweeting [Accessed 28 Aug. 2024].

Szeman and O'brien, S. (2017). *Popular culture: a user's guide*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, pp.213–241.

Tajuddin, F.N. (2018). Cultural and Social Identity in Clothing Matters 'Different Cultures, Different Meanings'. *European journal of behavioural sciences*, [online] 1(4). doi:https://doi.org/10.33422/ejbs.2018.07.67.

Takanashi, L. (2023). *Everything About Corteiz: The UK Streetwear Brand Co-Signed by Nike, Drake, Central Cee, and More*. [online] Complex. Available at: https://www.complex.com/style/a/lei-takanashi/corteiz-streetwear-everything-to-know.

Talbot, D. and Böse, M. (2007). Racism, criminalization and the development of night-time economies: Two case studies in London and Manchester. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(1), pp.95–118. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870601006579.

Tamimi, N., Hala Khalawi, Jallow, M.A., Gabriel, O. and Jumbo, E. (2023). Towards decolonising higher education: a case study from a UK university. *The International Journal of Higher Education*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01144-3.

Tamir, C., Budiman, A., Noe-Bustamante, L. and Mora, L. (2024). *Facts About the U.S. Black Population*. [online] Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/facts-about-the-us-black-population/.

Tanner, J., Asbridge, M. and Wortley, S. (2009). Listening to Rap: Cultures of Crime, Cultures of Resistance. *Social Forces*, 88(2), pp.693–722. doi:https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0271.

Tausif, M., Jabbar, A., Naeem, M.S., Basit, A., Ahmad, F. and Cassidy, T. (2018). Cotton in the new millennium: advances, economics, perceptions and problems. *Textile Progress*, 50(1), pp.1–66. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00405167.2018.1528095.

Terci, M. (2013). The Gentleman and the British Cultural Space. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies and Environmental Communication*, 2(1).

Terkourafi, M. (2010). *The Languages of Global Hip Hop*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

The Face Magazine (2024). *D-Block Europe are young Black rockstars*. [online] The Face. Available at: https://theface.com/music/d-block-europe-interview-rolling-stone-dirtbike-lb-young-adz-uk-rap [Accessed 26 Sep. 2024].

The Guardian (2021). *What a balaclava! Is the controversial headwear the new hoodie?* [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/feb/08/beyonce-balaclava-what-does-it-mean.

The Journal of Black Studies. (2009).

The Centre For Social Justice (2020). *FACING THE FACTS: ETHNICITY AND DISADVANTAGE IN BRITAIN Disparities in education, work, and family*. [online] p.6. Available at: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CSJJ8513-Ethnicity-Poverty-Report-FINAL.pdf.

Thiong'o, N.W. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: J. Currey; Portsmouth, N.H.

Thiong'o, N.W. (2012). *Globalectics: Theory and the politics of knowing*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Thomas, Z., Banks, J., Eaton, A.A. and Ward, L.M. (2022). 25 years of psychology research on the 'strong black woman'. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 16(9). doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12705.

Thompson, I. (2022). *Unpacking the interconnectness of Black Atlantic languages whilst disrupting linguistic supremacy…*. [online] Medium. Available at:

https://medium.com/@ifejoyce/unpacking-the-interconnectness-of-black-atlantic-languages-whilst-disrupting-linguistic-supremacy-928cbf1c7696.

Thompson, P. (2017). Foundations of Educational Technology. doi:https://doi.org/10.22488/okstate.19.000002.

Thornton, S. (1995). *Club cultures: music, media, and subcultural capital.* Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan University Pr.

Todaspit and Weaver, J.A. (1999). *Popular culture and critical pedagogy: reading, constructing, connecting*. New York: Garland Pub.

Todorović, T., Toporišič, T. and Pavko Čuden, A. (2014). Clothes and Costumes as Form of Nonverbal Communication. *Tekstilec*, [online] 57(4), pp.321–333. doi:https://doi.org/10.14502/tekstilec2014.57.321-333.

Torche, F. (2015). Intergenerational Mobility and Equality of Opportunity. *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie*, [online] 56(3), pp.343–371. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26573215.

Toynbee, J. (2013). Race, History, and Black British Jazz. *Black Music Research Journal*, 33(1), p.1. doi:https://doi.org/10.5406/blacmusiresej.33.1.0001.

Travis, R. (2016). *The healing power of hip hop*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, An Imprint Of Abc-Clio, Llc.

Trott, I. (2020). *What is hip hop and why does it matter?* [online] Academy of Music and Sound. Available at: https://www.academyofmusic.ac.uk/what-is-hip-hop-and-why-does-it-matter/.

Troxell, M.D. and Stone, E. (1981). *Fashion Merchandising*. Gregg Division McGraw-Hill.

Tsang, T. (2020). *The commodification of hip-hop culture and rap music*. [online] the jfa human rights journal. Available at: https://www.thejfa.com/read/the-commodification-of-hip-hop-culture-and-rap-music.

Tuazon, A. (2017). *Marketing Insights from Black History Month: A Look at Black Influence on Pop Culture*. [online] Market Research Chicago | Market Research Companies | C+R.

Available at: https://www.crresearch.com/blog/black-history-month-pop-culture/#:~:text=Modern%20dances%20like%20the%20hustle.

Tulloch, C. (2004). *Black style*. London: V & A Publications ; New York.

Tulloch, C. (2010). Style—Fashion—Dress: From Black to Post-Black. *Fashion Theory*, 14(3), pp.273–303. doi:https://doi.org/10.2752/175174110x12712411520179.

Tulloch, C. (2020). *BIRTH OF COOL: style narratives of the African diaspora.* S.L.: Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

Tungate, M. (2009). *Luxury world : the past, present and future of luxury brands*. London: Kogan Page.

Turner, M. (2019). *Hip Hop as Cultural Capital: Remixing Bourdieu's Theory to Affirm Cultural Wealth*. [online] Available at: https://ellids.com/archives/2019/03/2.3-Turner.pdf [Accessed 25 Sep. 2024].

Turner, P. (2017). *Hip Hop Versus Rap: The Politics of Droppin' Knowledge*. Routledge. doi:https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315544663.

Turner, P. (2019). *HIP HOP VERSUS RAP: the politics of droppin' knowledge.* S.L.: Routledge.

Turney, J. (2019). *Fashion Crimes*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Turner, T. (2019). *The sports shoe: a history from field to fashion*. London, UK; New York, Ny, USA: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

Ubel, P. (2017). *How The Psychology Of Income Inequality Benefits Luxury Brands*. [online] Forbes. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterubel/2017/02/28/do-luxury-brands-benefit-from-income-inequality/?sh=4bd4ffde27b5 [Accessed 6 Jun. 2024].

Uberoi, V. and Modood, T. (2012). Inclusive Britishness: A Multiculturalist Advance. *Political Studies*, [online] 61(1), pp.23–41. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00979.x.

UM, H.-K. (2013). The poetics of resistance and the politics of crossing borders: Korean hip-hop and 'cultural reterritorialisation'. *Popular Music*, [online] 32(1), pp.51–64. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23359881 [Accessed 1 Jun. 2021].

Urban Dictionary (2015). *Urban Dictionary: sauce*. [online] Urban Dictionary. Available at: https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=sauce.

Usborne, D. (1993). *Wiggers just wannabe black: White middle-class kids are adopting black*. [online] The Independent. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/wiggers-just-wannabe-black-white-middleclass-kids-are-adopting-black-street-style-and-chilling-out-to-rap-music-david-usborne-reports-from-washington-1462591.html.

V Magazine (2019). *Top 25 Supreme Collaborations of All Time*. [online] V Magazine. Available at: https://vmagazine.com/article/top-25-best-supreme-collaborations-of-all-time/.

Vallier, K. (2021). *Neoliberalism*. Summer 2021 ed. [online] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neoliberalism/.

Van Vaerenbergh, Y. (2017). Consumer reactions to paid versus unpaid brand name placement in song lyrics. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(2), pp.151–158. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/jpbm-05-2016-1167.

Van Vaerenbergh, Y., Van de Sompel, D., Van Loock, N. and Vermeir, I. (2011). The Impact of Brand Name Placement in Song Lyrics on Brand Attitudes: Does the Attitude toward the Artist Matter? *Advances in Advertising Research (Vol. 2)*, [online] 2, pp.21–33. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8349-6854-8_2.

Varol, E. (2021). Being a style icon in fashion world: Iris Apfel. *Global Journal of Arts Education*, 11(1), pp.89–101. doi:https://doi.org/10.18844/gjae.v11i1.5727.

Veblen, T. (1899). *The theory of the leisure class*. [online] Macmillan. Available at: https://moglen.law.columbia.edu/LCS/theoryleisureclass.pdf.

Vences, N.A., Díaz-Campo, J. and Rosales, D.F.G. (2020). Neuromarketing as an Emotional Connection Tool Between Organizations and Audiences in Social Networks. A Theoretical Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, [online] 11. doi:https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01787.

Verhaal, J.C. and Dobrev, S.D. (2020). The Authenticity Paradox: Why the Returns to Authenticity on Audience Appeal Decrease in Popularity and Iconicity. *Journal of Management*, 48(2), p.014920632095041. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206320950414.

Vernon, J. (2018). *Hip hop, Hegel and the art of emancipation: let's get free*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vingilyte, J. and Khadaroo, A. (2022). Personal clothing style and self-concept: Embracing the true, the ideal and the creative self. *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc_00130_1.

Visser, V. (2015). *The relationship between status- and conspicuous consumption in luxury brands in the South African emerging market*. [online] login.microsoftonline.com. Available at: https://ucreative.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/relationship-between-status-conspicuous/docview/1705555052/se-2?accountid=14178 [Accessed 25 Jun. 2024].

Vito, C. (2019). *The Values of Independent Hip-Hop in the Post-Golden Era Hip-Hop's Rebels*. Cham Springer International Publishing, pp.71–97.

Vogue (2018). *Virgil Abloh Biography and Career Timeline*. [online] Vogue. Available at: https://www.vogue.com/article/virgil-abloh-biography-career-timeline [Accessed 2018].

Vogue (2019). *Little Simz Is A Modern-Day Dandy In Head-To-Toe Gucci At The Fashion Awards*. [online] British Vogue. Available at: https://www.vogue.co.uk/news/article/little-simz-gucci-fashion-awards-2019.

Vogue (2023). *Mains Spring 2024 Ready-to-Wear Collection*. [online] Vogue. Available at: https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2024-ready-to-wear/mains.

Vogue Business (2022). *Why everyone's talking about Corteiz*. [online] Vogue Business. Available at: https://www.voguebusiness.com/fashion/corteiz-clint-and-the-future-of-streetwear.

Vogue Business (2023). *Naomi, Stormzy And Louis Theroux Sit On The Front Row At Skepta's London Fashion Week Show*. [online] British Vogue. Available at:

https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/skepta-naomi-stormzy-fashion-week-mains [Accessed 17 Sep. 2023].

Volta (2019). *On Top Boy, UK Grime and the Rebirth of Tracksuits*. [online] VOLTA. Available at: https://voltamagazine.wordpress.com/2019/12/13/on-top-boy-uk-grime-and-the-rebirth-of-tracksuits/.

Von Glasersfeld (1998). *Radical constructivism: a way of knowing and learning*. London; New York: Routedge/Falmer.

Walker, B.W. (2021). A dynamic reframing of the social/personal identity dichotomy. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 12(1), p.204138662110204. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/20413866211020495.

Walker, R. (2012). *Black Cool One Thousand Streams of Blackness | Black Cool X Redux*. Catapult.

Wallace, R. and Johnson, D. (2018). *Sounds of oppression: the lost inheritance of the UK reggae scene: Global Studies Association (GSA)*. [online] University of Northampton's Research Explorer. Available at: https://pure.northampton.ac.uk/en/publications/sounds-of-oppression-the-lost-inheritance-of-the-uk-reggae-scene-2 [Accessed 1 Aug. 2024].

Walvin, J. (1999). *Black Ivory: Slavery in the British Empire*. Blackwell.

Walvin, J. (2000). *Britain's Slave Empire*. Tempus.

Walvin, J. (2016). *Making the black Atlantic: Britain and the African diaspora*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, An Imprint Of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Walzer, D.A. (2016). Independent music production: how individuality, technology and creative entrepreneurship influence contemporary music industry practices. *Creative Industries Journal*, 10(1), pp.21–39. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2016.1247626.

Wang, Y. (2021). A Conceptual Framework of Contemporary Luxury Consumption. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, [online] 39(3). doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2021.10.010.

Wang, Z. (2022). Re-Shaping Innovations in the Contemporary Fashion Show: Emerging Aesthetics and the Rising International-Based Chinese Designer Collective. *Design and Culture*, 14(3), pp.315–340. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2022.2067942.

Warren, C., Batra, R., Loureiro, S.M.C. and Bagozzi, R.P. (2019). Brand Coolness. *Journal of Marketing*, [online] 83(5), pp.36–56. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26973087.

Warren, C. and Campbell, M.C. (2014). What Makes Things Cool? How Autonomy Influences Perceived Coolness. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(2), pp.543–563.

Warren, C., Batra, R., Loureiro, S.M.C. and Bagozzi, R.P. (2019). Brand Coolness. *Journal of Marketing - American Marketing Association*, 83.

Watkins (2005). *Hip hop matters: politics, pop culture, and the struggle for the soul of a movement*. Boston (Mass.): Beacon Press.

Waugh, C. (2022). *The Irony of Streetwear: inequality, consumerism, and status*. [online] Global Social Challenges. Available at: https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/global-social-challenges/2022/07/06/the-irony-of-streetwear-inequality-consumerism-and-status/.

Waugh, M. (2020). *'Every time I dress myself, it go motherfuckin' - ProQuest*. [online] www.proquest.com. Available at: https://www.proquest.com/docview/2437705034?parentSessionId=4ue1NUt7Tg6NAn4H224ihsTjN0NCUzd6flOU9UIVXOE%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=14178 [Accessed 14 May 2023].

Waugh, C. (2022). *The Irony of Streetwear: inequality, consumerism, and status*. [online] Global Social Challenges. Available at: https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/global-social-challenges/2022/07/06/the-irony-of-streetwear-inequality-consumerism-and-status/.

Weaver, S. (2016). *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour US, UK and Global Race Joking*. London Taylor And Francis.

Wei, H.T., Chan, W.S. and Chow, D.H. (2023). Systematic review of selecting comfortable sportswear: Predicting wearing comfort based on physiological responses and materials properties. *Textile Research Journal*, 93(15-16), p.004051752311678. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/00405175231167863.

Weitzer, R. and Kubrin, C.E. (2009). Misogyny in Rap Music. *Men and Masculinities*, [online] 12(1), pp.3–29. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x08327696.

Welters, L. and Cunningham, P.A. (2006). *Twentieth-century American fashion*. Oxford ; New York: Berg.

Welty, M. (2013). *The History of Supreme's Music Collaborations*. [online] Complex. Available at: https://www.complex.com/style/a/matt-welty/supreme-collaborations-music-history.

Wesley, L. (2015). The Intersection of Race and Gender: Teaching Reformed Gender Ideologies to Black Males in the Context of Hegemonic Masculinity. *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships*, 1(4), pp.63–84. doi:https://doi.org/10.1353/bsr.2015.0010.

West (1993). *Race matters*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Weston, S. (2016). *Branding Burberry: Britishness, Heritage, Labour and Consumption*. [online] Available at: https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/19358/1/SOC_thesis_WestonS_2016.pdf.

Whitmore, A.K. (2016). The Art of Representing the Other: Industry Personnel in the World Music Industry. *Ethnomusicology*, 60(2), p.329. doi:https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.60.2.0329.

Wiedmann, K.-P., Hennigs, N., Schmidt, S. and Wüstefeld, T. (2012). The Perceived Value of Brand Heritage and Brand Luxury. *SpringerLink*, [online] pp.563–583. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8349-3722-3_27.

Williams, J. (2007). *'Tha Realness': In Search of Hip-Hop Authenticity*. [online] Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/76393822.pdf.

Williams, J.A. (2013). *Rhymin' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University Of Michigan Press.

Williams, J.A. (2015). *The Cambridge companion to hip-hop*. Cambridge (Gb): Cambridge University Press, Cop, pp.256–262.

Williams, J.A. (2020). *Brithop: the politics of UK rap in the new century*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Williams, P. and Hannerz, E. (2014). Articulating the 'Counter' in Subculture Studies. *M/C Journal*, 17(6). doi:https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.912.

Williams, T. (2019). *Meet GUAP: A Media Platform Dedicated To Discovering, Showcasing And Nurturing Emerging, Diverse Creatives*. [online] Forbes. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommywilliams1/2019/11/26/meet-guap-a-media-platform-dedicated-to-discovering-showcasing-and-nurturing-emerging-diverse-creatives/.

Williams, T. (2021). Meet 30 Inspirational Women This Women's History Month. *Forbes*. [online] 24 Mar. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommywilliams1/2021/03/08/meet-30-inspirational-women-this-womens-history-month/ [Accessed 28 Aug. 2024].

Wilson, E. (1985). *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.

Wolfson, S. (2019). Fashion killa: why are rappers at war with their stylists? *The Guardian*. [online] 15 Oct. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/oct/15/fashion-killa-why-are-rappers-at-war-with-their-stylists-kanye-young-thug.

Wong, C.P. (2018). Double Entendre Got Bodied: Strategic Ambivalence and Latinx Young Men Rappin' under the White Gaze. *Journal of World Popular Music*, 5(2), pp.193–212. doi:https://doi.org/10.1558/jwpm.37842.

Wood, A. (2009). 'Original London style': London Posse and the birth of British Hip Hop. *Atlantic Studies*, 6(2), pp.175–190. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810902981050.

Worley, M. (2017). *No Future*. Cambridge University Press.

Wrenn (1973). *The World of the Contemporary Counselor*. Houghton Mifflin.

Wijeyesinghe, C.L. (2021). *The Complexities of Race*. NYU Press.

Wild, B. (2016). Imitation in fashion: Further reflections on the work of Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel. *Fashion, Style, & Popular Culture*, [online] 3(3), pp.281–295. Available

at:
https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA472689340&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=20500726&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=anon%7E2e7ab70 [Accessed 5 Mar. 2023].

Williams, J.A. (2020). *Brithop*. Oxford University Press.

Wilson, E. (2003). *Adorned in dreams: Fashion and modernity*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Wisman, J.D. (2021). Inequality, Conspicuous Consumption, and the Growth Trap. *Oxford University Press eBooks*, [online] pp.389–418. doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197575949.003.0012.

Wright, J. (2010). *'Rapping About Authenticity': Exploring the Differences in 'Rapping About Authenticity': Exploring the Differences in Perceptions of 'Authenticity' in Rap Music by Consumers." Perceptions of 'Authenticity' in Rap Music by Consumers."*. [online] Available at:
https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=utk_graddiss.

Yasuda, M. (2011). *Modernity, Urban Space and Music Industries: Hip-Hop and Reproduction of Street Music in Paris and Tokyo*. p.https://figshare.le.ac.uk/articles/thesis/Modernity_Urban_Space_and_Music_Industries_Hip-Hop_and_Reproduction_of_Street_Music_in_Paris_and_Tokyo/10105427?file=18216092.

Yi, K. and Shorter-Gooden, K. (1999). Ethnic identity formation: From stage theory to a constructivist narrative model. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 36(1), pp.16–26. doi:https://doi.org/10.1037/h0087723.

Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), pp.69–91. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006.

You Tube (2018). *Skepta transforms new Rolls-Royce Phantom into rolling recording studio*. [online] www.youtube.com. Available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqGqysGgBk4&ab_channel=AutoMotoTV [Accessed 4 Feb. 2024].

Young, C. (2016). *Style tribes*. London: Frances Lincoln Limited.

Young, R. (2016). *Music, Popular Culture, Identities*. Brill Rodopi, p.168.

Young, S. (2018). *THE MYTH OF PROMISCUITY: EXAMINING BLACK MALE SEXUAL NARRATIVES AND SEXUAL IDENTITY*. [PhD Thesis] Available at: https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2469&context=etd.

Yuniija Kawamura (2005). *Fashion-ology : an introduction to fashion studies*. Oxford: Berg.

Zamani-Gallaher, E.M. and Polite, V.C. (2013). *African American females : addressing challenges and nurturing the future*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, pp.257–276.

Zanotti, B. (2021). *Counterfeits and the Appropriation of Streetwear: A Case Study of Dapper Dan*. [online] Available at: https://fabricofcrime.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Counterfeits-and-the-Appropriation-of-Streetwear.pdf [Accessed 7 May 2024].

Zargani, L. (2020). *Remo Ruffini On a 'New World of Luxury'.* [online] web-s-ebscohost-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org. Available at: https://web-s-ebscohost-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=a6231b70-dacd-4da5-9ec6-e283865a59af%40redis [Accessed 10 May 2023].

Zhang, J., Chen, M., Xie, Z. and Zhuang, J. (2022). Don't fall into exquisite poverty: The impact of mismatch between consumers and luxury brands on happiness. *Journal of Business Research*, 151, pp.298–309. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.07.010.

Zhang, Y. and Wildemuth, B. (2015). *Qualitative Analysis of Content*. [online] Available at: https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yanz/Content_analysis.pdf.

Zhang, Z. and Patrick, V.M. (2018). Call Me Rollie! The Role of Brand Nicknames in Shaping Consumer-Brand Relationships. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 3(2), pp.147–162. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/697074.

Zhou, J. (2021). How Has Street Culture Changed the Nature of Luxury? *Communications in Humanities Research*, 1(1), pp.77–81. doi:https://doi.org/10.54254/chr.iceipi.2021227.

Zhu, Y. (2023). Exploring Burberry's Consumer Boycott: A Cross Cultural Comparison of the UK and China. *Academic Journal of Business & Management*, [online] 5(4), pp.30–36. doi:https://doi.org/10.25236/AJBM.2023.050406.

Ziemele, I., Šroma, I. and Kakarāne, A. (2018). Comfort in Sportswear. *Key Engineering Materials*, 762, pp.402–407. doi:https://doi.org/10.4028/www.scientific.net/kem.762.402.

Zigomo, Kock, R.G. and Donald, F.M. (2024). Relational authenticity in workplace friendships. *SA journal of human resource management*, 22. doi:https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2288.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Transcript of Interview with Lash

Lash/STEELO Interview Transcription

Speaker 1: Researcher (Tiri Murai)

Speaker 2: Participant (Lash)

Place of Interview: Central London

Duration of interview: 36:54

Date of interview: 22/02/2024

00:00:01 Speaker 1

Right. So first of all, thank you so much for taking part in my research.

00:00:07 Speaker 1

So the title, the working title for my research is the relationship between UK rap and luxury brands with a focus on the African diaspora. Do I have your permission to interview you and to record you?

00:00:22 Speaker 2

Absolutely yes you do.

00:00:23 Speaker 1

Perfect. So these questions are for doctoral research. I'm just going to give you a brief before we get in to it.

00:00:29 Speaker 1

They're semi structured. So I may ask you a question and then you may see something that kind of sparks interest and might kind of like drift.

00:00:38 Speaker 2

OK.

00:00:40 Speaker 1

And then as a participant, your insights will be a contribution to the originality of this thesis and to academia. And for now, I don't really have plans on publishing, but if it gets to that, then of course I would ask your permission later down the line.

00:00:58 Speaker 2

Of course sounds good.

00:00:59 Speaker 1

Great. So the first question I have is please can you share what Steelo is about and its relation to UK rap and luxury fashion?

00:01:10 Speaker 2

Cool. So a big heavy one to start off with. So yeah, Steelo

00:01:13 Speaker 2

Steelo is more.

00:01:17 Speaker 2

From like a background about culture and style.

00:01:22 Speaker 2

The reason I say both of those

00:01:22 Speaker 2

I think

00:01:24 Speaker 2

Style comes out of culture like things that happen in different places in the world. You see it, you translate it*, and that's what a different style. And then it you, you know, you get into this later on in that in the question, but then you see on the runway, that's the the the pipeline for me. So Steelo is all about community style culture.

00:01:41 Speaker 2

And you know the relationship to Africa is where we are from; me, myself and my friends. So it's got close ties into Africa and all of that. And that's where we get all our inspiration. And that's that's that's who we are, right.

00:01:52 Speaker 2

That makes us who we are today.

00:01:55 Speaker 1

Interesting. And so do you think there's a link between UK rap and luxury fashion brands? And if so, can you expand on what that link means to you?

00:02:08 Speaker 2

There's a link that's grown and why I say it like that is because when we're growing up in London, UK, rap or not rap, just generally because a lot of rappers are just people growing up in estates in London.

00:02:20 Speaker 2

We don't really wear high fashion that much. We have a tracksuit, we aspire to it. We still want a Louis Vuitton Belt, we still want a Louis Vuitton bag, but we look as you can even see on the videos on the screen, like people wearing tracksuit, that's that's the world where we're from.

00:02:34 Speaker 2

That said, lately there's been a closer tie and the reason I think that is because.

00:02:40 Speaker 2

Street wear is looked at very aggressively. I'll use the term by high fashion today. I don't know how long it's been going on. It's probably been going on. It might have been culture before, but now it's streetwear. Because that's where the culture is kind of coming through. So, there's an overlap, right? So whatever we wear on the street now, it's definitely what you're gonna see at a high fashion show; they've incorporated it.

00:02:58 Speaker 2

you can say thanks to people like Virgil Abloh, rest in peace, for doing things like that, like making it. We're not shying away from the fact that we get inspiration from the street anymore. We're gonna make it full front and bring the street with us. So yeah, and the easy one for atleast UK, Paris is just

00:03:14 Speaker 2

A couple hours away, so being around Paris Fashion Week before, it's just the parties and stuff we used to go to, but now we're in the shows. We're getting invited to the shows it.

00:03:22 Speaker 2

Just becomes easier because we're close to it. And yeah, I think that's about it, but the link has been formed based on.

00:03:29 Speaker 2

High fashion brands not being able to hide it anymore in my opinion.

00:03:31 Speaker 1

Interesting. Yeah. And you've mentioned the tracksuit and I've read some books about how pivotal the tracksuit is to UK rap. Would you say that that's kind of like a uniform or you know, what's the cultural relevance of the track suit? Is it to do with comfort like?

00:03:51 Speaker 1

For example, I view the differences. Some of the differences between US RAP and UK rap; UK rap may seem more relatable, even from the things that UK rap culture, the garments associated to it. It's more relatable. Would you say that the tracksuit has

00:04:09 Speaker 1

A role to play in that.

00:04:11 Speaker 2

So there's a; I think age is a journey across all of this because previously the tracksuit was affordable. It's what we could get.

00:04:17 Speaker 2

We wanted to wear the most fancy Gucci or whatever it may be, but the tracksuit was the thing that we could get and within that tracksuit, because I always say style is not the clothes you're wearing, it's you within that tracksuit style started.

00:04:32 Speaker 2

Seeping out there was a time when we started running around; Boy Better Know for example, we only used to wear track suits, then it became fashionable. Tech Pack tracksuits became the thing. Now every drill artist wears the tracksuit, its part of the inception point, right? So I think it's gone from.

00:04:49 Speaker 2

That being the only option to it then being the kind of trend cool thing and then now it's like this the reference, right, if you're from UK culture and you're rapping or just from the street you put a tracksuit on; a tech pack, Nike tracksuit or whatever it is. So yeah it's kind of bullied its way through but it's started from that being all we could afford to be honest.

00:05:07 Speaker 1

OK.

00:05:10 Speaker 1

And I've seen that Steelo documents cultural moments within the interplay of music and fashion, and through the moments that Steelo captures, what can you say about the intersection of UK rap and luxury fashion? Like, what are the aims of your visuals and?

00:05:29 Speaker 1

The effects of now everything that you put out, all the videos you put out because it seems very.

00:05:34 Speaker 1

Like behind the scenes, it's giving people a, you know, a.

00:05:36 Speaker 2

That's correct.

00:05:40 Speaker 1

A way to kind of see what really happens and also making it more relatable, like, oh, these are actually just people who are just kicking it, like they're really just. Yeah, so.

00:05:48 Speaker 2

Absolutely correct.

00:05:50 Speaker 2

Good question. It's exactly that, right? It's all like get rid of the façade, lift the curtain

00:05:58 Speaker 2

There's nothing we're doing here that you potentially can't do one day or you should’nt aspire to do one day. So it's been, it's BTS. We wanted to make sure whatever wish showing is raw. It's real bringing

fans or supporters closer to the artists in ways that a lot of the content doesn't today because, you know, on Instagram, you get ready, you get ready for that image you put across and then you go back in your robe potentially.

00:06:20 Speaker 2

So, it's that kind of approach and the kind of benefit that we've had on our side is that I have a lot of relationships in these pockets. So people are comfortable around me, right? So they're being themselves and that is a new a new viewpoint that I don't think was there previously ike everyone on camera comes from, I don't know.

00:06:37 Speaker 2

This big brand coming with a camera everyone kind of gets ready for the camera and becomes themself. I'm in the pockets in between that. So absolutely right, lifting the camera, making people coming from tomorrow the younger generation see and feel like they can be there in the future. And yeah, just kind of get rid of the facade. That is super complicated cause I feel that's what people do. Make things look complicated to keep everyone.

00:06:58 Speaker 2

Away when, Really

00:06:59 Speaker 2

It's not that complicated

00:07:00 Speaker 2

Like Wizkid or Skepta*. They're not in behind the scenes flying. They're not hovering, they're they're walking and eating like you are as well. So, yeah, it's that kind of viewpoint we want to portray.*

00:07:11 Speaker 1

And do you feel like just kind of branching of what you've said, do you feel that the work you do takes away from that superficiality that is surrounded by luxury?

00:07:22 Speaker 1

Like, you're kind of letting people know. Yes, it's big brands and you know it's it's an aspirational lifestyle, but it's not as superficial?

00:07:33 Speaker 2

Yeah. I think there's two sides. One will be to desensitise it a bit like, oh, it's not this crazy thing that Oh my God, high fashion.* You guys are the elite; different people go there. The same person you're on the train with yesterday might be at Fashion Week tomorrow.* It’s that side and definitely for like Nigeria, Africa, which is super important to us in everything we do. It's just giving them a look into what's going on over there.

00:07:54 Speaker 2

Right, I feel like if;

00:07:57 Speaker 2

I will be biased to Nigeria just because that's where I'm from, but if people in Nigeria have the resources or opportunity we have here, they will be 10X past where we are here, based on what they have now and what they create and do. They will be way further than we are and we take it for granted here.* So I just want to show the light. Let me show you that we can get into this later. We talk about like the giveaways we do in Nigeria, but just.

00:08:17 Speaker 2

I want anything we have here to be available as much as I can, whether it's just through reference, even the writings you're doing now is opening up that thinking space for them. But I want that to be accessible to them so they have the opportunity to become the next whatever name you call it.*

00:08:27 Speaker 1

OK.

00:08:30 Speaker 2*

That's a personal one for me as well.

00:08:31 Speaker 1

Interesting. OK. OK. Interesting. Thank you. What are your views on the relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion brands? And does this differ to the US rap context?

00:08:52 Speaker 2

So the relationship again - the main thing is that Paris, that's really super close to us, right. So it's easy enough to get there and get in a party before you know it, you've got into stand and before you know you're getting invited.

00:09:02 Speaker 2

But it's like.

00:09:05 Speaker 2

I'll talk about us when I say us, my world, me, Skep for example, it was like we were like always pulling up and being there and they were always referencing us in secret, right? We were always on their mood boards.* Like, it's not just now; the difference is with Virgil, rest in peace coming in. He made it obvious he didn't hide it.*

00:09:26 Speaker 2

He brought me to open the show. He brought us to the show*, he brought headie one.

00:09:29 Speaker 2

He made it obvious that these are the guys we are referencing. Let me bring you forward to come and reach some of the, the kind of tinsel and all the the glamorous lights around it. So I think that's that

was where the tie came. We started going Fashion Week early, probably not the first ones from the UK but in terms of like that UK.

00:09:47 Speaker 2

Rap culture scene, me and Boy Better Know, Skepta, our crew, we were the first to kind of start going there* again to the parties.

00:09:53 Speaker 2

Against that “Oh, why are you going Fashion Week for?” But now it's like the normal thing. So there was never really a link. But as with anything, things get adopted. And now it's like the normal. Like, if you wanna drop a new tune, if you're about to do something creative as a rapper, especially in UK, but maybe around the world, you'll go Fashion Week. So that's ours. Why? It kind of resonates more with us. I'll say in school.

00:10:14 Speaker 2

I mentioned that we did wear track suits and stuff, but that's what we could afford. But any excuse to get a fake Louis Vuitton Belt, we had it on. Right, in school, we wore prada’s. Like if you could get it somehow in the mix, we wore Prada’s to school. So these brands and people -

00:10:27 Speaker 2

Are worlds that we already always knew. So it wasn't like a new thing for us. Ohh now we can go, Louis. Oh yeah. I've been trying to wear Louis for the last 20 years anyway, so it was just very easy. So to get out of track suit and go to a show. It's very easy. So I think that's as close as the tie gets. It's a new tie. I don't think it ever really existed openly, but streetwear and culture

00:10:47 Speaker 2

has been driving fashion since way before I was born

00:10:53 Speaker 1

And do you see that as different to the US rap context the way you guys immersed yourself into the fashion world?

00:11:02 Speaker 1

You know, I feel like, correct me if I'm wrong, but I feel like in the UK context you kind of had to.

00:11:09 Speaker 1

Do kind of more than the US because the US are the mainstreams that probably accepted a lot easier.

00:11:16 Speaker 2

The challenge we have, in my opinion, is that in UK, whether it's more or less now, we kind of follow America, right?*

00:11:24 Speaker 2

So even if we had the style, we had the culture it's only when America said we did, that, we were actually thinking we did right. And I feel even in the last, what 5-10 years they've been adopting a lot of our culture; tracksuits, even the same thing I'm talking about, they're kind of pulling it over. So the difference from that perspective, yes, we've always kind of looked to them and tried to follow them. So when we were younger, you'd see us wearing baggy clothes.*

00:11:45 Speaker 2*

Like new era caps.*

00:11:46 Speaker 2*

And I'd argue, cause we're a bit lost, right? We're not in tune. Well, especially me growing up in and being born in England or UK.

00:11:55 Speaker 2

Like you kinda - everyday you're getting detached away from your culture, so you're always looking for something like it's different now; I'd argue it's different cause it's cool to be Nigerians call to be an African blah, blah blah blah buzzwords. But then it wasn't. It wasn't cool. Skepta talks about this all the time, but it wasn't cool like people took the piss out of you for being from here and there. So we're always looking. You're not gonna look home.

00:12:16 Speaker 2

At your what - your uncle? no way, you're gonna look at the TV and who was on TV? Americans. So, I think from our sake is that we had that battle between who and where we're from versus who we think we need to be. But in America, they've always kind of just been able to be them.*

00:12:29 Speaker 2*

Put it on, 'we're cool' and kind of push with it and the kind of the full circle is now Americans are looking for the culture and we are now kind of steering away from, like, copying Americans. So I think that would be the only tie that they kind of need the … and they were the only piece and people we were looking at until we knew what we; in my opinion, should be looking at.*

00:12:47 Speaker 1

OK. Thank you for that detailed answer.

00:12:53 Speaker 1

So Steelo is a pioneer in showcasing that interrelationship between music, fashion and culture in a very raw and authentic way. Personally, the first time I saw your videos I was like wow. Like, this is so cool because you don't really see that side, especially because everything is focused on the US side.

00:13:14 Speaker 1

And it's so glamorized, but this side, like I said earlier, kind of just shows, you know, a bunch of homies really kicking in and also getting money through what they're doing. So in your view, where does black cultural wealth and the African diaspora

00:13:29 Speaker 1

Play a role in the work that you do in relation to UK rap specifically, and then drawing on that. What kind of demographics are in the community Steelo has generated and how important is authenticity in that?

00:13:45 Speaker 2

Yeah. So super important.

00:13:48 Speaker 2

To answer the question directly, I even wrote on one of my notes. Authenticity is what we do. Taste and authenticity is what it's all about. So obviously in this life we've got all bills to pay and every cheque you get is probably a compromise. Somewhere from a brand, from a this from a that. But that is super important to us. So yeah, we're from UK, we're from London.

00:14:08 Speaker 2

African born, the analogies Skep always uses is that and I think it's so true, is that when you're in your house as an African child, you're in Nigeria, Africa, wherever you are. The minute you walk out your doors like you're in a new world like, alright, I'm in England now, OK let me sort myself out and like it's a whole different world.

00:14:27 Speaker 2

That we grew up living in because our houses were African households. There's no two ways about it. You'll be eating fish and chips at lunch. You come home and you’re gonna eat your traditional food. Period. Right. And It's more or less extreme for different people. So the point there is that, yeah, we are from that space UK born. But for Steelo specifically, we've always focused on.

00:14:46 Speaker 2

Nigeria or Africa. What I mean by that, all our giveaways, our pop ups started there and majority there.* They're the people that we're really trying to bring over to say what we're doing over here is great. It's cool. See it experience it. But the real source from what my opinion is the real source, the thing that makes us.

00:15:06 Speaker 2

The people you like and aspire to today comes from where you are. That's where it's at*. So it's all about just trying to get that thought process going and encourage people to kind of tap in. It's difficult there, of course not the same as being in the Western world, but tapping there because a lot of the

source that we're carrying now is that's where it's come from*, the little ties that our parents kept in us.

00:15:24 Speaker 2

Is basically what it is. So yeah, that's kind of our audience*. I always like to say STEELO itself, looks at tomorrow's Skepta, tomorrow's Wizkid. That's who we're trying to build and empower, but also in Africa.* Just closing that gap a bit like well for example we've done fashion week giveaways where after Fashion Week,

00:15:44 Speaker 2

We'll go and give away exactly what we're wearing here in Nigeria, but giveaway not sell just to show that we're not superior to you. There's not this, like, break all that facade as hopefully our content does as well. We're all normal people just in different situations experiencing different things, right. So that's one of the, the main thing that.

00:16:01 Speaker 2

STEELO slash Lasha always tries to break that facade of you need to be this famous Instagram guy to get achievements; Nah, I don't believe in that. Like there's more layers, there's more opportunities than people think and see as we do as well. So that's what STEELO is all about like tomorrow's opportunity.

00:16:16 Speaker 1

Interesting, that's really good. And kind of also highlights.

00:16:21 Speaker 1

Social impact, aside from just cultural impact, which is really, really inspiring and in your work, there's luxury brand product placement.

00:16:30 Speaker 1

Matter, and if so, how?

00:16:34 Speaker 1

So if let's say one of your videos like the one with Lancey Foux and Givenchy, is this something that you're trying to sell like a product or Givenchy as a brand or is it just like you're really just documenting the cultural moment and that designer and artist rapport?

00:16:53 Speaker 1

Or relationship.

00:16:55 Speaker 2

That was a good question. I'll say it's storytelling. That's what we do at STEELO.*

00:16:59 Speaker 2

And why I say it like that, is someone who's been tapped in from super early then to show Givenchy; that would have told the whole story for them because you would have seen that we linked Lancey when he was kind of just sorting himself out like and now he's in Givenchy, right. So it's not so much about Givenchy itself, but Matthew Williams, who was the creative director there, or artistic director.*

00:17:19 Speaker 2*

Or whatever term that they use. That's a friend of our community, a friend of ours.* So it was more of that tie. If it wasn't him in there, we wouldn't be in there per se.*

00:17:26 Speaker 2

And one thing I'll say about that and this is STEELO all All in all, was that that access was not pre approved. We just kind of it came like that like a lot of that access - if they had their way, we wouldn't be showing the majority of that but because of like who we are culturally we are who we are, Matthews brought us for who we are he came when we started filming and yeah that content came out because you don't really see that side of it.*

00:17:45 Speaker 2

Right, so it wasn't so much about Givenchy, it was more about the relationship in the community* and definitely the storytelling side is to see Lancey's progression right from an artist that was just kind of battling his way through the UK and we kind of done a few bits and he made a STEELO tune, for example. But now he's he's shooting for Givenchy, so that storytelling, that kind of.*

00:18:06 Speaker 2

Opportunity shown for the rest of the world. That is what we're showcasing. So it could have been any brand.* The only reason we shoot Louis Vuitton as well is because Virgil like there's always a relationship somewhere.* It's not just a brand - they didn't hire us to do that we went with Lancey to document him in there. And then at the end of it it's like "Ohh yeah, we like that. We can also use that because it showcases something." But it's always about relationship.*

00:18:27 Speaker 2*

Community* and again to your point, pushing our agenda, which is like authenticity, taste.

00:18:32 Speaker 2*

Culture and all of that kind of stuff.

00:18:34 Speaker 1

So you'd say that that personal relationship, it's important in what you do that you know you're going there because you knew Virgil, rest in peace or Matthew Williams or let's say Daniel Lee or whoever?

00:18:47 Speaker 2

Correct. Absolutely. To the T to the T. Because where we're from we're a lot like, even I'm not a model; but I've walked. That's because of a relationship. I don't. I'm not in no agency. I've never been in an

agency and it's kind of; it may restrict us*, but I always say this in everything I do I never work blind. So anything we kinda do is because there's at least an inch;

00:19:07 Speaker 2

Like Amy might know someone or.

00:19:09 Speaker 2

I know someone is some form of relationship and again it probably limits us to all the great things and we could be doing in, you know, floating quote marks. But yeah, it's always through a relationship. We know these people personally enough to think, alright, we're gonna go and like make this happen. And to be honest that's how these things also happen like Matthew kind of new us.*

00:19:29 Speaker 2

Got to see Lancey, then thought Lancey would be perfect, right. And that's kind of how I think it works.*

00:19:34 Speaker 1

So is it not about a product, but about the personality?

00:19:38 Speaker 2

Correct. There's no product that drew us there*, to be honest. Yeah, obviously, we used to

00:19:42 Speaker 2

Wear all Louis Vuitton belts, but right now, since Virgil's stopped, rest in peace, there's nothing really. Oh, yeah, Pharrell's in there, there's a few bits and bobs, but if you ask me, "oh, do you wear LV", I'll say I wear Virgil's collection LV.* That's the majority of what it is. If I'm being honest with you. So it's it is the personal tie* you even mentioned Daniel Lee; we went to Burberry not because we've never been to Burberry; we started going there when Daniel Lee entered*

00:20:03 Speaker 2

We started going to Bottega with Daniel Lee was there. We weren't there before, right? So it always starts from that.* And don't get me wrong, we're - we at the beginning we were talking about how it's like.

00:20:12 Speaker 2

More of a trend than this, like the IT thing a lot of rappers will start going to these places just through PR introductions now, because it's the thing to do.* But us, we've always gone through relationships. Always.*

00:20:21 Speaker 1

Amazing. That's interesting.

00:20:23 Speaker 2

Like we don't fuck with - we don't fuck with random brands*. It's because we know the person. There's there's something drawing us there and it makes sense kind of thing* .

00:20:34 Speaker 1

And so you've captured moments as I've just mentioned, like Lancey Foux, Skepta, JME, what is the cultural impact that's present when showcasing those exclusive moments for rap artists? And what is the effect on the community that you have through these artists?

00:20:53 Speaker 1

And their audiences as well.

00:20:56 Speaker 2

I'll say three things. We're showing personality of the artists that you don't usually see.* They grow from progression.

00:21:04 Speaker 2

As well as let me pick one more; the key thing that we want to show - their progression, growth, personality*

00:21:14 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think they're the main three things when we work with artists, that is what we're trying to showcase.* We're not. They're gonna be doing content and bits elsewhere; we're not exclusively working with them, but what you're shown through the STEELO lens is like.

00:21:25 Speaker 2

You'll be able to see him in his not rawest format, but a format where you can say, ohh this is what he was like, like for example Wizkid five years ago versus now. Put two pictures up. You'll see in the pictures there's there's two different impacts going on, but we always wanna be grassroot. We wanna get in there early, be part of the journey.* So then when you become a Lancey Foux touring in the world, it's like I'm locked in. That's where it came from.*

00:21:46 Speaker 2

Right. If anyone thinks of Lancey that didn't know Lancey before, a lot of people probably saw him through STEELO. So yeah, that's very important for us. And some of the guys you mentioned, Skepta, JME, they're kind of far their journey, but it's just showing insights that you don't normally see of them* all to that full circle of getting fans and artists closer together, like in, in my opinion.

00:22:04 Speaker 2

Artists and fans are separated by commercials that have got nothing to do with artistry or the passion of it. They're just separated by ticket sellers all these.

00:22:13 Speaker 2

Fashion shows whatever it is* because to get into the fashion show is not easy, but you just referenced my whole culture and I still can't really get in yet, so it's a bit of a challenge*. So I'm just trying to close that gap, bring them as close together as possible.*

00:22:26 Speaker 1

And you've just said something that kind of triggered a thought with, you know, referencing black culture and then not even having access, a lot of black people are having access or black artists that actually influence consumerism for those brands.

00:22:42 Speaker 1

Do you feel like that is kind of systematic to do with maybe, you know, like for example, there's a chapter in my thesis where I'm talking about oppression and how racial oppression and stereotyping is so related to this.

00:22:59 Speaker 1

And that kind of gatekeeping cause, for example, you know, a lot of these brands are white owned. It's I feel like there's a lot that has had to happen for it to be dominated by black culture. What are your views on that? Do you feel like it's related to that kind of oppression thing or is it kind of just?

00:23:17 Speaker 1

A thing, or even just your.

00:23:19 Speaker 1

Black culture being exploited.

00:23:23 Speaker 1

You know who's really the beneficiary of the?

00:23:26 Speaker 2

So yeah, I'll split it into two questions the beneficiary.

00:23:30 Speaker 2

It's not us when I say us. It's not the culture, it's not.* It's not right. But on a flip side, I don't wanna seem like a victim because again, and this might be hard for some people's ears, but we're in the Western world. This is like, so it's gonna be dominated by the people who's country it is.*

00:23:46 Speaker 2

Whether we like it or not*, so of course there's oppression. There's all these things that we can call out but it kind of just; the lay of the land. Yeah. It shouldn't be like that. No one should be oppressed. All these things. Of course, I agree. But the lay of the land is that we're in the Western world,* and that is mainly why we're always trying to power up back home.

00:24:02 Speaker 2

Like because that's where we can start talking about these things.* Yeah, we've got a company that's 90%.

00:24:07 Speaker 2

For example, the tribal mark film that we shot short film.

00:24:10 Speaker 2

90% cast and crew, 90% black or ethnic origin somehow some way because we can control it. It's us doing it right.* The minute you get sponsor in it or one of these firms, they're gonna do it their way.* So I don't take the victim seat, but definitely we're not. We don't benefit* right even to now like there's three stages*. One where they didn't.

00:24:31 Speaker 2

They didn't reference us or tell us that's where it's coming from*, we're acting like oh we don't care about that. But what? That's where it's coming from now*. There is the stage where they'll invite us and make us part of it. And really, that's for the credibility. When you drop these looks, you need to kind of have to cool people, the rappers, the following. But the real, real, real win is that we should benefit from it and.*

00:24:51 Speaker 2*

Benefit, I mean, like even if it was to book an artist or.*

00:24:54 Speaker 2*

A person of.*

00:24:56 Speaker 2*

I don't know culture to do a shoot. You're not gonna get paid properly. You might get paid whatever you think is a good check. It's less than what you're owed, and that is gonna just stay happening so that bit there is a harder one to fix.* Unless we start building our own organizations and all these like factories, ateliers houses, which is super difficult, they're years old.*

00:25:16 Speaker 2

But we have to start somewhere if we're if we're about it, we have to start somewhere and stop kind of copying and running to them.*

00:25:20 Speaker 2

And pandering to them, that kind of puts us in a in a weaker position.* So yeah, I'll say that just to kind of summarise, the beneficiary is definitely not us.* But at the same time, we're not a victim. We just have to keep doing something about it, similar to what you're writing there, similar to what we do at Steelo, Tribal Mark, we just gotta keep going* and yeah. And the people who get to the top,

00:25:41 Speaker 2

We should not get to the top and forget where we've come from. In terms of culture, in terms of our people that are where we are, who didn't make it out. What happens a lot, you get to the top and you just join them and you're like, ohh, just join that society, forget where you're from. You're, you've.
00:25:55 Speaker 2
Not helped and it's not good enough just to sit on the fence and say I'm not part of the problem. If you're not proactively trying to fix it, you are part of the problem still. So yeah.
00:26:05 Speaker 1
Interesting that thank you for that.
00:26:06 Speaker 2
OK.
00:26:09 Speaker 1
So in your view, do UK rappers influence luxury consumerism or aspirations in London for millennial and Gen Z Group specifically?
00:26:20 Speaker 2
I'll caveat it first and say not all UK rap.
00:26:22 Speaker 1
OK.
00:26:24 Speaker 2
Or cultured people because.
00:26:28 Speaker 2
You can't really fake taste and style, so you have it or you don't, but the people with it in that space, absolutely they influenced everyone. But I feel like every young person looks on upstairs and thinks what should I aspire to. When you're younger, It was like your older brother maybe or your older sister or whatever it is. But now you've got Instagram. You've got a million older brothers
00:26:49 Speaker 2
There's so many people you're looking at and trying to find your style. So yes, absolutely. Everyone gets inspiration from what someone is kind of how the world always worked. But from what someone else is doing. But of course you can look at the most popular people, so yes, but not every.
00:27:03 Speaker 2
UK rap or influential person has that pull people got a lot of visibility and attention but not pull. Like if someone says like; I always say Kanye is someone who says; if Kanye says go and buy that thing, you're probably gonna go and buy it.
00:27:17 Speaker 2
But if.

00:27:20 Speaker 2

Another less influential artist did it

00:27:24 Speaker 2

You probably won't buy it. I mean I listen to your music, but I'm not gonna go and take your buying decisions, right? So there's that's a big different difference. But some people don't know taste. So I'm just gonna see what he wore and I'm gonna buy it and then eventually grow out of it. That's what kind of.

00:27:37 Speaker 2

Happens if it's not that true, authentic taste curation or style, people follow you, follow you, follow you, and then get to like.

00:27:45 Speaker 2

18, and they're like I don't wear that anymore and just grow out of it rather than kind.

00:27:48 Speaker 2

Of stay on.

00:27:48 Speaker 2

That journey, which I think out of everyone, JME's done very well, like his fans were his fans when they were in school and they are still his fans when they're working for a courthouse for example, so yeah.

00:27:59 Speaker 1

Thank you.

00:28:01 Speaker 1

Question nine. I'm going to skip because you've just answered it about the beneficiary. How does your work relate to the Black British experience? Is that a consideration for steelo? And how is that communicated? Like you just talked about how important, you know, being African is in your work and?

00:28:20 Speaker 1

Connecting to your roots, but what about the black British experience? I'm not from the UK, so for me I look at this so objectively and I'm learning as I go.

00:28:32 Speaker 1

I can resonate with being black, but I can't resonate with the black British experience. Like, yes, I'm African, I'm Kenyan. But I didn't grow up here. So how? Because you've grown up here, but you're very African as well. That black British experience of being African, like you said.

00:29:00 Speaker 2

Up until.

00:29:02 Speaker 2

Just say.

00:29:06 Speaker 2

4,5,6 years ago. Yeah, it was a challenge. Well, even longer. I said this earlier, when we were at school it was not cool to be African. Like you rather say you're Jamaican than African just because it's not cool. So growing up it was a lot of that stuff being embarrassed of this or.

00:29:24 Speaker 2

Thinking you need to be embarrassed of all of these things. So it was a it was a massive

00:29:28 Speaker 2

Conflict. Like you go to school. Everyone's behaving like this. And what actually starts to happen, you start to just conform into it. It becomes the norm. So the reason I had to think for a sec in like, primary school. I did'nt think 'ohh everyone's being racist to me'. But in hindsight looking back, yeah, it was the only two black kids in the class and we kind of always would;

00:29:49 Speaker 2

I wasn't an angel. But it was five of us in trouble, it's always the black kids getting double trouble.

00:29:53 Speaker 2

Like little things, you kind of look back and think, but at the time it was just the normal**. We didn't know anything else. Well, if anything, we were also trying to suppress and quiet down the African side like 'hey mum, you're embarrassing me'. Because it's like that's what we think we know. But I think now it's changed cause everyone's; you can't hide it; that's where it's at and that's why we're going double hard to make sure now we've got a voice and now we know.

00:30:15 Speaker 2

Much more. Everything we do kind of showcases; everything you like and think you like about us comes from the fact that we've got African culture in us. So when you say black British, yeah, London is cool like, but our version of London is cool so throughout our whole journey, what we learn at home.

00:30:29 Speaker 2

Like the strictness at home, all those things made us who we are in the London British journey. So, I think there's no detachment at all.

00:30:37 Speaker 2

Between how we are as an African person or African cultured people and the black British people growing up here, there's no separation, I don't think 'oh yeah, to be black British is different'

00:30:50 Speaker 2

Then what would have been if this country was maybe I don't want to say it wasn't.

00:30:55 Speaker 2

Ok, If it was in Nigeria, it's different. It's a different surrounding. The way you grow up, it's all different. But we're still brought up in the same way. It's just in a different situation. So that kind of answers; I hope that answers the question kind of, yeah.

00:31:06 Speaker 1

Yeah, no, it it does. Thank you.

00:31:08 Speaker 2

Because, yeah, we were always who we were, and we were trying to suppress it … to the point where we realized we don't need to suppress it and now we're these people that always keep going to Africa

00:31:17 Speaker 2

So I think it's always been in us, but just the way we kind of translate it* and the good thing about London is all different cultures, right? So it was never like maybe more difficult in America and stuff, but you go out, there's a Turkish shop, there's a Indian shop, there's a Chinese shops that you're always in the mix of, we're all out here in the space. But when you talk about like the institutions, yeah, definitely you can feel that.

00:31:38 Speaker 2

Question. Maybe not when you're there, but if you think my gear been black British wasn't as hard as it was when people before me. When there's actual racism. But it was definitely difficult and probably more difficult than somewhere like America because it is so separated.

00:31:52 Speaker 1

So do you communicate that black British experience in your work here at Steelo?

00:31:59 Speaker 2

I think the only way we'll kind of.

00:32:02 Speaker 2

Communicate it is by.

00:32:04 Speaker 2

Just separating the gap between; separate the gap.

00:32:08 Speaker 2

So we'll show. Yeah, we're here. You see us going to Fashion Awards, but.

00:32:12 Speaker 2

We'll bring Portable there for example.* So that would be the only difference, because maybe Portable would have never got there before. So through our work, we show that that gap is not really there* and there's no reason why you guys, for example, portable where he is from, can't be in the same place with all the best fashion people in the world like it can happen. It's just situational arguably*

00:32:33 Speaker 2

I think that's as far as we showcase through our work, but one thing we don't do at STEELO, we don't, we're not very we don't have much of A voice that we don't wanna talk. Oh, we're doing this. But you see it if you see it, you get it run with it if you don't.

00:32:45 Speaker 2

Too bad, we're not really trying to push an agenda. We only want to be a platform that allows people to go and grow and do what they're doing. We don't want to be the guy or the voice dictating it. However, we're gonna give you it's like we're a library, go and read what you want. We're a library. Take what you want. Believe what you want. Challenge what you want.* But we don't want to be the voice. Although we do have an opinion.

00:33:05 Speaker 2

Lash has got an opinion that you maybe see through it, but yeah, we're more of a platform play rather than like a voice, per se, a community platform*.

00:33:13 Speaker 1

OK.

00:33:16 Speaker 1

Very cool.

00:33:19 Speaker 1

Do you see any contributions of the African diaspora through UK rap within the luxury fashion space, and this includes people of Caribbean descent aside from just African descent, and I know this is redundant, but I.

00:33:31 Speaker 1

Just have to.

00:33:31 Speaker 2

No, it's definitely not redundant because at first when I wrote it, I wrote a few names and I thought ohh we're missing our like Caribbean guys out. But if you look at all the high fashion shows and all that, who's there? Their, their culture people. Hmm. Candidly, right. Obviously there's other people that will go there, but majority of like the maybe English white people or other countries doing it, they're probably doing our music right.

00:33:53 Speaker 2

Yeah, that's that's it. Who's the top artists in our country,

00:33:56 Speaker 2

They're all African or Caribbean, maybe, but majority African like the top in the biggest in the world. Taking America aside. Africa, we've got the Wizkids. We've got those guys killing it, and also here,

Skepta, Lancey, Dave, Stormzy. These are African people, all West African, to be specific. Right. So there's definitely a tie. There's definitely something that shines through and.

00:34:17 Speaker 2

Yeah, absolutely. And then of course to to kind of bring it to the high fashion side, they're the people they're calling and casting at their shoots.

00:34:25 Speaker 1

And front row as well.

00:34:26 Speaker 2

Exactly all of that, just like not exploiting, but capitalising.

00:34:32 Speaker 1

OK.

00:34:33 Speaker 2

Not exploiting, no one's a victim like you don't have to go. But it's like you don't pay us enough. You use us for the sauce cause you know; who said it the other day G, G from Patta, we had a long conversation with him. But he was just kind of explaining all these brands. We're.

00:34:46 Speaker 2

Cheap agencies today, right?* If you go to big agencies, they're gonna charge them so much to get that same source and reach and all that good stuff. But if they go to 10 influence or 10 rappers, they get that for a fraction of the price and more authentic*, you know, so it's kind of what it is. So we're never going to get what we really deserve,* but at the same time.

00:35:06 Speaker 2

It's. Yeah, it's us. it's us, Africans, us cultured people, that are kind of driving the charge right now globally and even in fashion and music, everything.*

00:35:15 Speaker 1

Yeah, OK, amazing. And the last question, where does fashion and identity play a role in your work?

00:35:25 Speaker 2

So me personally, I take taste and style very serious and it's not so much about it being the most expensive piece in the building. It doesn't have to; remember I said that with tracksuits. It's just being you having your identity like my things always been – personally, and then I'll get onto STEELO because I kind of drive STEELO's vision a little bit is that you always want to have identity.

00:35:45 Speaker 2

Be different like I'm always looking for an excuse to try and without like I always said. It's a difference between a costume and an outfit, so I don't wanna come out looking crazy just so people see me, but

I wanna have my identity and be different so that is where it personally comes from. Then going onto STEELO

00:36:00 Speaker 2

STEELO is style. The word STEELO; when you're growing up, Steeze, Steelo comes from – it means style. So like I said it earlier. Style, taste, authenticity. That is paramount in what we do.* And so in every edit we do, everything we shoot. There might be some brands that kind of flow through that I would love to pluck out sometimes but yeah we take that kind of fine detail.

00:36:20 Speaker 2

You know very, very seriously, because that is our that is our only message. You know, when I talk about we don't like have a voice, our voice comes through what you see.*

00:36:27 Speaker 2

Like Oh yeah? Ohh, I'm seeing them; them lot are wearing that. Alright, cool. I trust their vision. I trust where their. I want to wear that. So very, very, very strict about things like that brand affiliation. What we put around us and that's* because style is our currency culture is our currency.*

00:36:44 Speaker 1

Thank you. thank you so much.

00:36:51 Speaker 2

Thank you. My pleasure.

Appendix 1.2: Transcript of Interview with Shaybo

Shaybo Interview Transcription

Speaker 1: Researcher (Tiri Murai)

Speaker 2: Participant (Shaybo)

Place of Interview: FaceTime (online)

Duration of interview: 22:45

Date of interview: 16/04/2024

00:00:03 Speaker 1

Hey! I am so happy, thank you so much for doing this. Like God bless you.

00:00:20 Speaker 2

Listen, no problem. Listen, I know what it's like to be in uni

00:00:24 Speaker 2

You know, practicing for your PhD, well, I did’nt do my PhD, but like dissertations and stuff. So wherever you need help I will be happy to! How is it going so far?

00:00:33 Speaker 1

Thank you so much!

00:00:44 Speaker 1

It's going good, like basically what I wanted was to get a male perspective and a female perspective and you were the first person that cause; I just feel like you're just so real and you're just authentic.

00:00:56 Speaker 1

And your music is great. I'm from Kenya, so I came to the UK 10 years ago. And like part of the thing that made me like feel; cause I used to hate London and what made me love London is the music and your music; Like it spoke to me and it just made me feel like good.

00:01:21 Speaker 1

You're seem so true to yourself. I don't see you like someone who, like an artist who's kind of trying to, like, conform to what is expected of you or anything like that, you know?

00:01:40 Speaker 1

So yeah, it's going good.

00:01:42 Speaker 1

So you're the first rapper that has actually responded to me, so I'm just so happy. I have been getting the courage to DM rap artists, so I am so happy right now! This interview will be recorded as well, I hope you don’t mind.

00:01:50 Speaker 2

Sure of course.

00:02:05 Speaker 1

And thank you because immediately I messaged you like you responded. And I'm just so happy.

00:02:11 Speaker 1

I'm grateful.

00:02:14 Speaker 2

No problem whatsoever

00:02:16 Speaker 2

I understand especially being in uni, that's not easy, it's not.

00:02:20 Speaker 2

Especially for black women as well.

00:02:21 Speaker 2

anything you need.

00:02:25 Speaker 2

I'm here. I got you! And your skin is glowing!

00:02:29 Speaker 1

Thank you, it's probably just me being hot in my flat! You look great! Perfect. So I have the questions. I don't want keep you for too long.

00:02:48 Speaker 2

That's fine.

00:02:50 Speaker 1

So it's eight questions. So the first question I have is, do you feel there is a connection between UK rap and luxury fashion and if so, what is?

00:03:08 Speaker 1

What? What do you find the connection to be?

00:03:11 Speaker 2

So yeah, there's definitely a connection between UK rap and fashion, for example, because.

00:03:19 Speaker 2

UK rappers we are very influential through our music and fashion brands use us as a way to promote their their their fashion and their brands and stuff like that. So for.

00:03:30 Speaker 2

Example and you.

00:03:31 Speaker 2

Will find that you know in a lot of fashion, shows are happening all over the.

00:03:35 Speaker 2

World. You're gonna see a lot of.

00:03:37 Speaker 2

Influential artists like rappers and musicians and stuff like that. Dave was actually at the Louis Vuitton fashion week, Skepta was at Louis Vuitton fashion week. So I feel like brands understand the influence of having rappers speak about their brands, wear their brands for example.

00:03:57 Speaker 2

When Cardi B did that song, I like it like that and she spoke about the.

00:04:03 Speaker 2

Balenciaga shoes that look like socks, it sold out. When Nicki Minaj spoke about Fendi as well, it's sold out. So I feel like fashion brands are understanding that a lot of the influence that.

00:04:16 Speaker 2

Come from certain places come from musicians and come from artists because we all have our own fan bases. So the bigger you are, the more the brands want.

00:04:23 Speaker 2

To get involved.

00:04:25 Speaker 2

And it's just about, you know, aligning each other influence and stuff like that. So anywhere, there's influence.

00:04:30 Speaker 2

Natural. It's just natural.

00:04:32 Speaker 2

Marketing anywhere there's influence brands are going to.

00:04:34 Speaker 2

Want to get involved

00:04:36 Speaker 2

Puma got involved with me.

00:04:39 Speaker 2

Yeah. So I was their brand ambassador, but they knew I was had influence at that particular time. So I just feel like it's the best way for them to kind of promote what they're doing because they know we have certain demographics. So they look at the demographics we have.

00:04:56 Speaker 1

OK. And the second question is, as a female rapper, how does dress or certain brands contribute to your image and?

00:05:08 Speaker 1

Is this something you think about? Is it, or is it just something that you're just like? Yeah, I'm just going to put on this. I'm just going to put on that.

00:05:16 Speaker 2

So.

00:05:18 Speaker 2

I have my at me as a person, because I feel like Shaybo as a brand. Every artist has a brand right? But me as a person, I'm somebody who's very like.

00:05:28 Speaker 2

I like jeans. I like crop tops. I like high heels and stuff like that. But when it comes to my videos, I like to dress in ways that are.

00:05:38 Speaker 2

Unique and authentic to what I do. So for example, my ‘dobale’ video, I am from Nigeria. I wanted to do an Ankara because that's Nigerian culture outfit. For ‘my sister’ I wore zigman, who's a designer so.
00:05:52 Speaker 2
I have; every artist will have a fashion stylist who will come.
00:05:57 Speaker 2
In and and.
00:05:57 Speaker 2
Source in new clothes and things that are like off the runway and stuff like that to kind of make us look unique and different to other people. But every artist has a particular brand, so my brand.
00:06:12 Speaker 2
It's very much gracious. So I like to wear suits. I like to wear things that are shiny.
00:06:19 Speaker 2
Like in my video ‘mud’, I was wearing a Zigman outfit, so it was a suit. I went from a tracksuit to a suit. In ‘my sister’, I wore Zigman again. So I like to wear things that are authentic and custom made for me. But most of the time artists work very close with their fashion stylist to kind of find their type of styles because everybody.
00:06:39 Speaker 2
Every artist has a unique style to them.
00:06:41 Speaker 2
So for example, ice spice, she has her, her infamous curls, she has a type of way she dresses. She doesn't dress too high end, she dresses relatable to the kids because she understands that that's where her demographic is. So she wants to be somebody.
00:06:57 Speaker 2
Who is seen as a
00:06:58 Speaker 2
Normal girl who just happens to be a rapper whereas.
00:07:01 Speaker 2
Somebody like Nicki Minaj and Cardi B, they’ll wear the Christian Dior’s the Balenciaga’s, the Balmain’s and stuff like that because they wanna appear and they wanna seem like they're higher class and stuff like that. So it really depends on your taste and what you're into and your demographic because some people are calculated.
00:07:19 Speaker 2

In trying to reach their demographic, so for example, I understand that I have black girls, so I wear certain things that I know that the black girls would relate to. For example, my thing is wigs because like every black girl can understand when it's like they know where the wigs is flowing

00:07:39 Speaker 2

And on top of that, because I'm from Nigeria, I knew that the Nigerians would relate to the Ankara that I was wearing. So it's just about being relatable and understanding yourself and and your your type of style as an artist and just as a person.

00:07:52 Speaker 1

Yeah, OK. OK. So you would say that this role of the stylist?

00:07:56 Speaker 1

Is a relevant role.

00:07:58 Speaker 2

Very relevant like I have a really close relationship with my stylist.

00:08:02 Speaker 2

We literally go.

00:08:03 Speaker 2

Back and forth. So how it happens; If you're interested in understanding the process; is I will send them the song. The stylist will get the treatment from the director and the stylist would make a mood board for outfits per.

00:08:19 Speaker 2

Per scene so it it has a lot to do with the coloring, the mood of the place. For example, it might be in a ball room. We're gonna find an outfit that's going to suit a ball room. If I'm in a cinema, we're gonna find.

00:08:31 Speaker 2

An outfit that's; you.

00:08:31 Speaker 2

Get what I'm trying to say? A stylist will create a moodboard depending on the song.

00:08:36 Speaker 2

And the mood and the actual aesthetic of the video.

00:08:38 Speaker 2

And then I get to sit down with her and choose what outfits I wanna go with from that moodbard, type of thing. But then we go back and forth because I'm somebody who's very

00:08:48 Speaker 2

Like involved; some artists

00:08:50 Speaker 2

Don't care, they just leave the stylist to do what the stylist is doing. But because I'm somebody who's very; has a very strong sense of identity, I go back and fourth with my stylist to pick what's best for me. So, for example, if she suggested leggings because it's Givenchy or something, I would say no because I don't wear leggings.

00:09:11 Speaker 2

I'm more of a suit girl or like a

00:09:13 Speaker 2

You know latex girl type of thing, so it depends.

00:09:18 Speaker 1

OK. OK. Interesting. That's so helpful. And the third question, why do you feel brands are mentioned in rap lyrics? And I noticed one of your one of your songs, the cover is like Crocs with like brand.

00:09:36 Speaker 1

Brand things on them on your one of your covers. So why? I mean I know that's cover art, but in your lyrics or in any rap lyrics from your perspective, why yeah, why do you feel that brands are mentioned?

00:09:50 Speaker 2

Brands are mentioned, so it's it's it's for two reasons. The artist could just love the brand, and just want to build a relationship with that brand by mentioning them. But most of the time, brands actually pay the artist.

00:10:03 Speaker 2

To mention them, because sonically, if you're listening to a song over and over and over again, just like that song that I explained - the Cardi B song with Balenciaga socks. If you hear that song, you're gonna wanna get the Balenciaga socks because it's attuned in your head because you like song. So with me making 'Crocs', I actually have a relationship with the.

00:10:23 Speaker 2

Brand so I wanted to get a deal from that brand. So that's how it works. So when you're like for example 69.

00:10:32 Speaker 2

Mentioned Fashion Nova, but that's because it's product placement. So brands are understanding the influence we have as artists and they understand how far music travels. So it's like, for example, if McDonald's did, if you watch your TV, you're you're definitely going to see a McDonald's advert. But with music, sonically it reaches a

00:10:51 Speaker 2

Wider demographic, because if you look at people's streams, it's about 63 million, 70 million and 120 million. So when you are mentioning Fendi, Balenciaga, Crocs, all of these things.

00:11:04 Speaker 2

Naturally, it's in their minds because music travels further. Does that make sense?

00:11:10 Speaker 1

Yes, yes, yes.

00:11:11 Speaker 2

That's why they pay for product placement. It's it's it's just a part of marketing for the brands and the artists. So it's just a way to get a check basically

00:11:24 Speaker 1

Interesting. OK, so it goes both ways. It's not just one sided? And when writing your music is talking about this kind of goals, I guess you've already answered this question cause I said when writing your music is talking about luxury brands important to you and why and you've basically already, you know said why you would mention those brands. It's to get that product.

00:11:44 Speaker 1

He's a non partnership. Yeah. OK. And how connected to luxury fashion are you and and and and also how do you see that connection with UK rap? Is it mainly because of business or is it something that also connects to aspirations of the?

00:12:03 Speaker 1

And consumers and and whatnot.

00:12:07 Speaker 2

Yes. I'm just. I feel like if we are and everybody as a person has their views and their thing that they like to do. I'm somebody who's very big on how I dress, how I look, my wigs and stuff like that. That's just my views. So I so for a while I was doing high end fashions like I.

00:12:24 Speaker 2

Was getting Christian Diors

00:12:26 Speaker 2

Fendi's, Balenciaga's, all of that stuff. But then the more I grow the person, the more my view changes. So now I'm going on to off the runway brands, brands that are not specifically known. Umm, but they're still designers. So I'm very interested in like.

00:12:43 Speaker 2

Those brands now. So I think it's just a matter of everybody has their own thing and it's a status thing as well for for for male rappers, for example, Fredo, Dave, and all of these people, you're gonna, you're

always gonna see them in some type of designer drip. Some type of designer outfit or it's it's just for them to say

00:13:03 Speaker 2

I'm more status I can afford to get these things, so a lot of rappers always get the new season things, especially in the American Music culture, because it's a status thing. It's like we have the new season. You don't have the new season type of thing, so that's what it is. So when people go into the fashion world, especially musicians and artists, they kind of just want to show off.

00:13:23 Speaker 2

Show that I'm wearing the new designer, the designer that's not in stores yet. The designer that's that's like.

00:13:28

OK.

00:13:30 Speaker 2

Off the runway type of thing. So it's just like a status thing most of the time, but some people, that's just what they're interested in. Some people are interested in shoes. Some people are interested in jewellery, but some people are just interested in what's new with fashion type thing.

00:13:51 Speaker 1

OK. And do you see just adding on to that? Do you see a difference between the UK Rap and the US rap scene within that interconnection.

00:13:57 Speaker 2

There's a there's a massive difference. I feel like the the the US are very big on fashion and brands. And but that's because it's like it's their culture to be wearing the new things like when the new season Gucci came out, everybody was wearing it in America. But in the UK because the music scene is so small, there isn't a lot of

00:14:19 Speaker 2

Especially female artists, and there wasn't a lot of budget for the women in the music industry, so it's very hard to maintain that type of lifestyle and that type of branding does.

00:14:31 Speaker 2

Makes sense? But most of most of the male artists, it's like I need to get the new trainers. I need to get the new jeans. I need to get the new T-shirts, type of thing. But for the females, it's very rare, which is why you don't see a lot of females in the UK industry wearing all the guccis and the pradas and this and that because they know.

00:14:51 Speaker 2

It's very hard to maintain* and the UK culture for the consumers and the people that are watching.

00:14:57 Speaker 2

The UK culture don't really like people flexing on them, it's OK for guys, but for girls, it's very like patronizing. That's what I learnt as an artist. It's like UK girls don't like girls.

00:15:12 Speaker 2

Looking like ohh I've got a chain. I've got this. I've got that it's – its unrelatable

00:15:18 Speaker 2

So that's why people – artists are learning that, you know, be relatable because the American culture is different from the UK culture. So that's why you see somebody like Central C,

00:15:28 Speaker 2

He's a multi millionaire, but he's still in tracksuits because he knows his demographic

00:15:35 Speaker 2

wants somebody that's relatable to them that's wearing track suits, does that make sense? He could easily go and buy, you know, Prada or Louis Vuitton, But he knows that his fan base are usually young people in tracksuits. So that's why he sticks to the tracksuits thing. People like Dave, of course they have the expensive watches, but they try to keep an understated look

00:15:54 Speaker 2

Because they understand the culture that we're in. If you walk into a room and you're wearing a 50K chain or a 30K chain and you're wearing Louboutin's, people are going.

00:16:03 Speaker 2

To project their insecurities, naturally, even.

00:16:05 Speaker 2

Without meaning to, there's even times when I have walked into a room and I'm wearing 1000 pound shoes and my chain is on. It's like it's a different energy, but when I'm wearing track suits and I'm just dressed normal, I feel like they they'll move towards me and they're more like warm towards me. So it's just about understanding that the UK culture

00:16:26 Speaker 2

Is very different from the American culture as far as consumers.

00:16:31 Speaker 1

OK. And so do luxury brands matter to you? I think you've kind of answered that question in terms of clothing, whether it matters to you.

00:16:46 Speaker 1

And you've already kind of said how you know, now you're going through the brands that aren't just those flashy brands, but more the authentic of the runway kind of brands, And do you feel that the African diaspora is a contribution to UK rap?

00:17:07 Speaker 2

Yes. Yeah, I feel like before back in the day probably like.

00:17:10 Speaker 2

5-10 years ago.

00:17:12 Speaker 2

Africa African culture itself was not as popular.

00:17:17 Speaker 2

But I feel like we've made it popular and I feel like right now is the season of Afro Beats and Nigeria and just the Afrobeat world is becoming big like Wizkid, getting a Grammy, Burna Boy; Grammys, like the Nigerian culture didn't used to have.

00:17:33 Speaker 2

All of that.

00:17:34 Speaker 2

So now we're just in a world; we're in a society.

00:17:37 Speaker 2

Where it's like.

00:17:38 Speaker 2

Nigerian and African culture is just cool now. Does that make sense? So I feel like everybody and everything has a phase, like, even in fashion, you'll see the old fashions being brought back and renewed. So I just feel like African music is now like the in thing . But for how long? I don't know. But like

00:17:58 Speaker 2

Before it was Jamaican, and dance hall and stuff like that. So, when you go to parties now, of course they have the Jamaican thing. Then they have the old school bangers, but afrobeat has very much taken over the parties.

00:18:11 Speaker 2

Everybody wants to like vibes to Afrobeat and stuff like that. So it just depends on what people like at that particular time, but it's very; when answering that question, think about; speak about the difference in time.

00:18:26 Speaker 2

And how? Just things have changed and varied depending on time. Because about 10 years ago. It wasn't – Yeah you would not hear afro-beats in the club.

00:18:35 Speaker 1

And so do you think that it's been, I mean cause you know you're of Nigerian heritage?

00:18:40 Speaker 1

Do you feel like the UK rap itself has a lot of them? Those African faces now?

00:18:48 Speaker 1

You know, in the scene and apart that make the genre of.

00:18:55 Speaker 2

I wouldn't say that yet. I I would say that the Nigerian community in Nigeria.

00:19:01 Speaker 2

Has made the UK scene, but it's it's it's very difficult for people that are Nigerians in the UK to get to certain places and the reason why I say that is because we're still in England. So the black community is only 5%, England is 95%. So we're talking about the Midlands, the.

00:19:22 Speaker 2

You know this place, that place. So a lot of the times in Afrobeat, they don't understand what we're saying. So we have to understand that our percentage.

00:19:29 Speaker 2

of our community, whichever country we come from, as black people. It's only 5% in the UK. So we're still not reaching a certain demographic that we could reach. So a lot of these afrobeat artists, they have a million streams even though they're popular, they only have a million monthly listeners. But somebody like Jorja Smith will have 24.

00:19:50 Speaker 2

Or something. But that's because of the country we are in.

00:19:53 Speaker 2

Does that make sense? But in Nigeria - if I was to go to Nigeria, I'm popping in Nigeria, I'm bigger in Nigeria than I am in the UK. Because the Nigerian culture understands what I'm saying in my music. Does that make sense? So that's why.

00:19:55 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:20:08 Speaker 1

Yes. OK, OK. OK. And the last question, I guess you've actually already answered this, it was, do you get any, do you get anything in return for mentioning wearing luxury brands? Is this product placement strategic or something you just do because you like the brand and you've?

00:20:27 Speaker 1

Already answered that.

00:20:28 Speaker 1

Very detailed. So yeah, that's the end. Ohh my gosh, you're.

00:20:33 Speaker 1

You're just amazing. You're you're really you've contributed so much to to this more than you know. And I will definitely let you know if I pass!

00:20:43 Speaker 2

No problem, no problem! But yeah, everything is calculated. It's like a business transaction, with the fashion world and artist world

00:20:53 Speaker 2

It's literally like McDonald's branding themselves on TV. A lot of artists have influenced a lot of the people

00:21:01 Speaker 2

These young kids would wanna get red hair if Nicki Minaj got red hair or they would wanna get Fendi if Nicki Minaj got Fendi. It's like you aspire to be like an artist, does that make sense?

00:21:11 Speaker 1

Yes, yes, yes.

00:21:13 Speaker 2

That's why they.

00:21:13 Speaker 2

Understand the influence we have as artists. But I hope that helped.

00:21:18 Speaker 1

Oh, it helped more than you know. Like, this is amazing. It's just I feel like I'm even gonna write it out right now. Thank you. So so Much!

00:21:28 Speaker 2

Much no problem. I'm glad.

00:21:30 Speaker 2

I could be.

00:21:30 Speaker 2

Of help, if you have any questions or need help

00:21:32 Speaker 2

Just feel free to message me.

00:21:34 Speaker 1

Ohh thank you. God bless you immensely. Thank you so much. Have a lovely, lovely, lovely rest of the week. You're gorgeous. I'm a huge fan. I can't wait for new music. I'm waiting and have a lovely, lovely.

00:21:52 Speaker 1

Evening. God bless you. Bye bye.

00:21:54 Speaker 2

Bye!

Post Interview: DM VOICE NOTE: In relation to the question of female rap artists possibly feeling objectified through dress and style

00:00:09 Speaker 1

Hey, how you doing? No problem. It's fine. Anything I can do to help! So, does being a woman, do I feel objectified and stuff like that. No, I don't. And that's in how I carry myself. I've made it very much about my talent. And when you make it very much.

00:00:22 Speaker 1

About your talent, that's what people only see you for. If you objectify yourself and make it about sexuality, then people are just going to look at you for something that can be sexually.

00:00:32 Speaker 1

You know, so it just depends on how you present yourself and how you carry yourself, and that's how people are going to treat you.

Appendix 2: Transcript of Interview with Grace Ladoja

Grace Ladoja Interview Transcription

Speaker 1: Researcher (Tiri Murai)

Speaker 2: Participant (Grace Ladoja)

Place of Interview: Zoom (Participant was in Lagos, Nigeria; Researcher was in London, UK)

Duration of interview: 1 hour, 5 mins

Date of interview: 30/10/2023

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Perfect. UM, right. So I am going to just start, right. Well, I'll introduce myself. My name is Tiri. I'm born and raised in Kenya. I've been here for 10 years and I started my PhD. I was funded, thankfully, in 2021.

00:00:20 Speaker 1

And yeah, so my topic is UK rap and luxury fashion, a study of influence and consumer patterns.

00:00:26 Speaker 1

From 2015 to 2024, and I kind of wanted it to focus more on the African diaspora to really show the cultural wealth that the African diaspora contributes. And of course I looked at I've I've seen you speak before and just everything you're saying in terms of what

00:00:46 Speaker 1

You what you advocate for and also the work you've done with your companies. I just thought you'd be the perfect person.

00:00:55 Speaker 1

So the first question I have is this PhD research is based on the interconnection between UK rap and luxury fashion. Do you think there is a relationship between the two and if so, what are your views on this relationship?

00:01:18 Speaker 2

Yes, I absolutely think there is a relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion, I think that like a lot of when you think about UK music, even just historically from like UK garage culture, which was like I'd say there was phases. So before grime, which is really kind of the thing that.

00:01:37 Speaker 2

You know, UK rap and grime is that period that you're talking about 2015, which is really pivotal just before that came UK garage and UK garage was pretty much all based on like the luxury flex like really about like young

00:01:56 Speaker 2

Artists young Black artists in particular, looking expensive and the whole genre was based on, you know, buying designer clothes like buying. They'd call them off keys. So, like Moschino off keys Versace, you know, going to the club, popping champagne.

00:02:18 Speaker 2

Driving Audis, it was a real error in music, which kind of pioneered that like black luxury music style, which I think, you know, if you look at the iterations of how it goes, it went from that to the extreme opposite, right.

00:02:38 Speaker 2

So if I use the artist that I worked with, Skepta, as the example. You know, when I met him, he just.

00:02:41 Speaker 2

You know, gone through; he just finished a song called Rolex Sweep, which was all about, like, wearing my Rolex. Like being flashy, being luxurious, etcetera. And that was really important at that time because I felt like it was; It is still; It was important both sides, but I think.

00:03:01 Speaker 2

At the that turning point for Skepta, where he went back to his roots of like, you know, bringing it down before bringing it up, it was really kind of based on mindset. I think before it was just people buying into luxury.

00:03:16 Speaker 2

Because they; luxury had kind of shut them out.

But in that 2015 and beyond, there was a different influence in luxury fashion from other artists that were doing it the right way from like what Kanye West was doing with Paris Fashion Week.

I think Fashion Week played the pivotal role in the way that it changed, I think.

00:03:36 Speaker 2

Like that era of like Virgil Abloh, Don C, Kanye. That crew kind of, you know, A$AP Rocky going to Paris, being like, in Fashion Week, it was more about being part of fashion than just consuming it. So they were like, we are part of this culture now, you know, whether it was on a surface level or not, it still felt like

00:03:59 Speaker 2

It was a bit more accepting.

00:04:01 Speaker 2

Of it, whereas before where Skepta was kind of like say, you know like just you know say you know closing the door on Rolex sweepers because he didn't feel like they wanted him to be part of it, it

wasn't a culture that was embracing him. Do you know what I mean; Rolex were not giving anyone watches, you know all people were not giving anyone clothes.

00:04:13

OK.

00:04:21 Speaker 2

Whereas in 2014/2015 and beyond, you know UK culture was and European culture in terms of the importance of fashion and fashion weeks being really in Europe.

00:04:34 Speaker 2

It allowed more access to the artists, to the designer and to the process. So, when I was working with him, he was able to meet like Jeremy Scott, who was like the creative director of Moschino, a brand that he loves. He was able to connect with it. He was able to talk about his ideas. It was a a different level and I think.

00:04:55 Speaker 2

That shift with the artist has followed through, you know, you see other artists like, you know, Dave now is walking for Louis Vuitton, you know I mean and it's part of it. So the consumer you know the the icon in fashion that knocking effect happens to the consumer; people saw Skepta and Virgil as friends and were like of course.

00:05:16 Speaker 2

We're gonna buy Louis V, so that had them buying it and all the other artists are like, yes, it's fine to buy it because it's, you know, they're part. You know, we're part of the culture instead of being used for it. So I do feel that that connection was really, really important at that.

00:05:32 Speaker 2

Time, and I think that now.

00:05:34 Speaker 2

Sorry, you know you can carry on.

00:05:35 Speaker 1

No, no, no, no, no.

00:05:37 Speaker 1

No, no, I.

00:05:38 Speaker 1

I wanted to ask you where that shift changed from, you know, UK rappers kind of not being seen or included in the high fashion world to them now being included. Was it around the time where people were noticing Skepta and Virgil

00:05:55 Speaker 1

are friends?

00:05:57 Speaker 2

Yeah, I definitely think that it's like Kanye, Virgil, you know, they really pushed that through

00:06:03 Speaker 2

Paris Fashion Week, actually ironically became a thing to do. If you look at one of Skepta's lyrics of Shutdown, yeah, he said, went to Fashion Week I shut down. That's really important for him because, you know, being accepted into, like, the Fashion Week parties being accepted into like that world being paid.

00:06:23 Speaker 2

To DJ, being paid to perform, it's a different acceptance before you're on no matter what. Before that point, everyone was kind of on the outside of it. They were like trying to, you know, they were just consumers. They weren't really part.

00:06:37 Speaker 2

Of it, it was really The Pioneers and not as many, you know. Like I say, the reason I think Skepta is really integral in the UK side is because with him, his contemporaries were like A$AP Rocky and ASAP, Nast, do you know? I mean, it was like the the US guys and then Skepta was the British icon in that and you know what I mean; the person that was able

00:06:57 Speaker 2

To kind of like.

00:06:58 Speaker 2

Have that impact here in the UK so.

00:07:02 Speaker 2

I feel like, yeah, that era shifted right there when, like, you know; there was there was a store, there was a store called Pigalle which, you know, if you do a bit of research, you'll know more about it. It was really important. It always embraced all the artists, all the rappers there was.

00:07:18 Speaker 2

A club called Pom Pom.

00:07:20 Speaker 2

That was ran by like Charaf

00:07:22 Speaker 2

Who's the creative director of Casablanca. It came from club culture and partying; Charaf had a club called Pom Pom, and everyone would go.

00:07:32 Speaker 2

We would go there, we would see A$AP Rocky we would see Virgil, we would see Kanye, we would see everyone during fashion week because it was a way for people to celebrate, you know, hang out, you know, go to some shows that they liked. But just have that kind of unity together. So I would say that that that those kind of things were really important as well. It was a, you know like in the same way that we always say that.

00:07:53 Speaker 2

Dance floor was so important. Yeah, I don't think. I think it's less important now in 2024, but growing up, it was really important to go to a party together, be together, you know, and.

00:08:03 Speaker 2

I think that, you know, Pom Pom and Charaf made that a platform. Virgil played a big part in that because he essentially learned to DJ after he got the job. He realised the importance of bringing it into, you know, he was the creative director and founder of Off-White. Everyone was coming to see him in Paris for Off-White why he was inviting all the

00:08:23 Speaker 2

Artists, all the

00:08:24 Speaker 2

Rappers from all over through his show. You know, I don't know if you remember that moment where at the Brit Awards, Kanye West brought everyone out on stage. He brought, like, Skepta, Stormzy, everyone when he performed, I'd say around that time was really key because what was happening in that culture and at that time the exact same thing was happening in fashion.

00:08:46 Speaker 2

It was like, you know, we will go, you know, these same people were moving around Europe, going to fashion weeks, connecting together, like talking about fashion, like making fashion feel a bit more inclusive. I remember actually a moment in a studio

00:09:00 Speaker 2

That Kanye was emailing Phoebe Philo to get into the

00:09:04 Speaker 2

Show you know.

00:09:05 Speaker 2

I mean, people were like saying, like, we're gonna be in the show now. We're coming to the show. You know, you're not gonna. We're not just gonna consume anymore. And I think Virgil had a huge role to play with that with Off-White because he was one of the first black designers to have

00:09:21 Speaker 2

a way to invite people into fashion. That's why his brand did so well, because the black consumer, especially the Black British, consumer

00:09:29 Speaker 2

Had a way of being able to be part of it without feeling like they were, you know, in somewhat just being invited as a token or a novelty, it felt much realer.

00:09:40 Speaker 1

Wow, thank you so much for such a detailed answer.

00:09:50 Speaker 1

So and with metallic ink, how does metallic ink contribute to UK rap and luxury? The luxury fashion intersection?

00:10:01 Speaker 2

I think that well, my co-founder Alex Sossah from metallic, he actually was the person that created. There's a division, there's a talent division now in, in agencies like model agencies where they look after talent. And one of the major things is that they place talent into fashion; Alex Sossah actually created

00:10:21 Speaker 2

That role for Next models. So he was the first person to bring like A$AP Rocky to Fashion Week. Get people like, you know, more like Octavian, Skepta, like these people into Fashion Week, etcetera. And him and Saif and

00:10:38 Speaker 2

I feel like that essence has always been like how do you make sure that you know when you talk about luxury, you know the historical part of it and the same reason why Jay-Z, like, stopped drinking Crystal is that you just are there to amplify it and and consume it. But they don't really want you to.

00:10:57 Speaker 2

Be part of it.

00:10:58 Speaker 2

I think that.

00:10:59 Speaker 2

You know that that shift happened in the UK, where people were like.

00:11:04 Speaker 2

I'm not going to wear anything unless I can be part of it. And actually I would use Skepta as an example again. You know, one of his most prominent lyrics that got him that you know his Mercury Prize and that era was when he spoke about throwing the Louis Vuitton in the bin. You know what I mean; he spoke about it in records and it was like, ohh, it's OK now to wear.

00:11:24 Speaker 2

Louis Vuitton again, because Virgil is there, you know, so you've gotta think about how important that is for the consumers of that music. And when they're pioneer and their icon is saying, like, you know what?

00:11:36 Speaker 2

We're not gonna really partake in places or things with people that don't accept us. Yeah, that's a that's a strong thing to say. And you know, you gotta think in 2014 when that happened, what impact that would have had on all the younger artists coming up behind Skepta, like Stormzy or Jhus or.

00:11:56 Speaker 2

Dave, you know they would have, been like ohh we don't need to, you know. That's why kind of everyone defaulted back to tracksuits for a bit. But then when Virgil really took that power in 2015, it kind of was back on the cards again, you know? So I don't know if I've answered your question. Oh, yes.

00:12:10 Speaker 1

So no, you have you have.

00:12:13 Speaker 2

Metallic; so we've always felt like for me, I always thought of like, how do I make sure that if I work with anyone and artist, I create an authentic story and I've always had this idea of having everything feeling Uptown and downtown.* So for me, I was like, OK, if I'm working with an artist.

00:12:29

OK.

00:12:33 Speaker 2

Like a Skepta, he's Uptown*

00:12:36 Speaker 2

You know he's he loves to

00:12:38 Speaker 2

He looks great in a suit. He likes, you know, accessories like Bottega. He likes things like this. Like, how do we how do you position someone in that space authentically. And that's kind of what was really important for us. It's like, authenticity is actually absolutely possible to partake in high fashion.

00:12:39 Speaker 1

MM.

00:12:58 Speaker 2

Even if you've come from the streets and you've come from nothing and all of that but you*, you just have to do it authentically to you. And it's really about, like working with brands and people.

00:13:11 Speaker 2

That have the same values. So whenever we worked with anyone with Skepta it would be like what is the value exchange like you know, Skepta works a lot with Givenchy because Matthew Williams was there and you're just buying into the the relationship with the the the creative director and the talent is really crucial.

00:13:32 Speaker 2

If you look at it right now, right now today it's based on The Who is in the the you know who's in the room, it's happened with.

00:13:43 Speaker 2

Matthew Williams being at Givenchy or, you know, Max Maximilian being at Ferragamo. Yeah, you know that it can completely shift the brand. It can completely shift the way that luxury and rap interact. You know, so that designer actually, the reason that Louis Vuitton brought

00:14:03 Speaker 2

Pharell back is cause they could not lose that rap consumer. They could not lose it. It was too big for them to lose.

00:14:10 Speaker 2

That audience, you know, they.

00:14:12 Speaker 2

Had to stay with that audience because that audience also has the buying power they have the buying power. And when you look at how it filters down, it's like, you know, they influence.

00:14:23 Speaker 2

A lot of people, so their influence becomes on the athletes on you know, the everyday person that has a disposable income. Their influence is really important.

00:14:32 Speaker 2

So I feel like that relationship with the designer now and the brand is really important. Look at Burberry. Burberry are a very British brand.

00:14:42 Speaker 1

That's what I was just about to ask you. I was just about to ask you.

00:14:45 Speaker 2

You know, Yeah. Daniel Lee has managed to forge incredible relationships with

00:14:52 Speaker 2

A lot of people

00:14:53 Speaker 2

That come to his show and partake in his brands from Bottega to here, because its Daniel Lee

00:14:59 Speaker 2

For Burberry, or Daniel Lee for bottega like his front row was Burna Boy, Skepta, you know, the athletes, Saka. Kano you know, Michael Ward like, you know, you know Wiz Kid like, you know, the diaspora was so present in that show. It was really, really strong.

00:15:19 Speaker 2

And I was like, the only thing missing is that this. Imagine if this was a black designer or a black owned brand, It would take it.

00:15:25 Speaker 2

To another level but.

00:15:27 Speaker 2

Having said all that, it was great to see the power of that relationship.

00:15:32 Speaker 1

Yeah. And do you think the

00:15:35 Speaker 1

Acceptance of black British

00:15:41 Speaker 1

Creatives in the luxury space; the lack of acceptance years ago, of course, before Virgil played his role, was based off race? Or is it just a classist thing? or kind of trying to, brands trying to preserve?

00:15:55 Speaker 2

I think it's a bit of both. I think that UK rap was never sexy music. You know, people don't. People didn't play it in pack. They didn't play it in those rooms. It wasn't something that was like, ohh. I'm gonna go and play some rap, you know, like UK rap, because half the time they didn't understand what

00:16:14 Speaker 2

They were saying, and it wasn't like the songs were not what they are now. You know, if you think about, like, how the music's evolved, like, think about, you know, UK rap now, like, Stormzy, is that rap? It's more.

00:16:26 Speaker 2

Like singing, it's.

00:16:27 Speaker 2

Like other stuff Jhus, is that rap is that hard rap?

00:16:31 Speaker 2

I don't think it is. I think Central Cee is the closest thing

00:16:35 Speaker 2

To like you know, I'm just talking about

00:16:37 Speaker 2 – relate to race

It in outside of Drill and all of that, just talking about it in the fashion sphere, Central Cee is like it works with Central Cee because he's racially ambiguous. You know, I don't think people think ohh, Central Cee is a black rapper, you just think ohh, he's sweet, you don't really class him in any category. So I do think there was a bias for sure, I definitely think.

00:16:58 Speaker 2*

It was like there was a bias based on like it was aggressive, it was black men. They can't really fit these clothes, the samples, or the clothes don't look great on them etcetera, etcetera, you know, but then it became like broken

00:17:12 Speaker 2

By like someone like Skepta, who's, yes, he's a big guy but he's very handsome, you know what I mean, he can carry himself well, he wears clothes well, you know, it changes the the status quo. And the same with like, you know, like someone like Dave who has a similar kind of, you know what I mean, appeal. And then now like all the African diaspora.

00:17:32 Speaker 2

To like Rema and all these guys that are now walking, I know it's not net specifically UK, but it's still important to acknowledge the importance of like Rama being at Balenciaga. Very strange pairing on paper you know so.

00:17:47 Speaker 2*

I think that, yeah, there was definitely like a a bias there and a bit of like based on race on class. It wasn't really sexy. It wasn't something to be, you know, it's different from punk. Punk was always affiliated to class. It was still, you know, you still want, you know, like people that were rock'n'roll.

00:18:06 Speaker 2*

Humble and you could still be rich and be that you know, whereas a rap it never came from a case of affluence. You know, it was always from the streets. It was always from the bottom up. So it's not as appealing.

00:18:21 Speaker 1

Interesting. OK. And what is the process of connecting artists you manage to luxury brands and building brand partnerships? Is luxury product placement of core element of music, videos and social media and other forms of visuals and imagery or is this just clothing.

00:18:41 Speaker 1

To fit with or amplify an artist's brand or aesthetic.

00:18:47 Speaker 2

So you say that again?

00:18:49 Speaker 1

What is the process of connecting artists you've managed even now or in the past, to luxury brands and building brand partnerships? Is luxury product placement of core element of music, videos and other forms of visuals and imagery? Or is it just clothing to fit?

00:19:09 Speaker 1

With an artist's brand and identity.

00:19:13 Speaker 2

I think that it's more it can be deeper than that and I think that it's important to try it and do it less than you know and I never try to work with artists or people that just will do anything. I think it's really important to try and foster real partnerships that can elevate both sides. Any partnership should be an exchange.

00:19:33 Speaker 2

So if you know it works really well, take the finances out. It's that cultural impact should be felt, you know, by the people that will be. It should be like woah, that was really a great project to do and

00:19:46 Speaker 2

I think that Skepta and Bottega did that really well, when he did the Bottega campaign, Because I don't think people expecting him to be in a suit and really like that kind of character in that way. But it wasn't like a weird positioning and, you know, the support that that happened that, you know, he ended up doing a lot of videos where he wore suits and.

00:20:07 Speaker 2

You know, he worked with Daniel Lee quite closely on, like, some of that product and, you know, custom products and the right product etcetera.

00:20:14 Speaker 2

So I feel like it if you get it right, it can be really beneficial and I think that it definitely elevated him into another world of places where you know like maybe you know, you know more luxury other lifestyle brands from cars to watches to whatever. You know you've got to think that no matter what people have to wear

00:20:35 Speaker 2

clothes in videos. So it's just like who do you, what do you want to align yourself with that you think you can have a better, more meaningful partnership with because it's got to happen anyway, you know? And I feel like.

00:20:47 Speaker 2

You know, I came from an era of like, you know, considering details like style. I came from like a film era where it's like you're supposed to be communicating something with me. If I'm watching something, it shouldn't be random. It should be. It should be part.

00:21:02 Speaker 2

Of the narrative. So I feel like sometimes when I look at, you know.

00:21:07 Speaker 2

Any artist I work with, I'm like, what story are we trying to tell? What we're trying to communicate here and it's really important to try to consider that because there's so much content. There's so much stuff.

00:21:19 Speaker 2

Happening it's like.

00:21:20 Speaker 2

How do you?

00:21:21 Speaker 2

You know even fashion, people find it quite fickle. Or if I say to someone like, you know, that works in a completely academic job, they'll be like fashion, they just go and buy clothes, you know, and wear them. But, like, you know, in the world that we operate in, it's such a huge part of it.

00:21:40 Speaker 2

So I think it's really important to really consider those partnerships.

00:21:44 Speaker 2

Make them meaningful through authenticity and try and elevate yourself and the brand equally like the brand should speak to an audience they couldn't speak to and the artist should speak to a new audience and it's a win.

00:21:56 Speaker 1

OK. OK. OK.

00:21:58 Speaker 1

So as a music manager and executive, is product placement an important factor for? Do you feel it's important for artists to progress commercially?

00:22:13 Speaker 2

I think the right partnerships 100%, OK, I think if you look at someone like Central Cee, if he when he did Jacquemus, it opened them up to a completely new audience like he wasn't doing anything in fashion. It completely changed how people saw him. He looked really good. You know what I mean, it was really like

00:22:32 Speaker 2

It really elevated him, in my opinion. Like wow, I messaged him saying like, you look amazing in that shoot, you know. But I think that that allows people.

00:22:46 Speaker 2

To you know, if you think about it, this is his job. So his job is to sell products and he sells music

00:22:51 Speaker 2

But he can sell other products.

00:22:53 Speaker 2

So it allows other brands opportunity to see what ways they can work with him to amplify their products, which is a commercial offer. You know, I mean and from that I'm sure he got.

00:23:06 Speaker 2

A lot of other partnerships because he was able to navigate and the

00:23:11 Speaker 2

most important place to be able to talk is in fashion. If you can speak in high fashion then you will get any deal you can get as an artist. You can get any placement because it's the hardest place to work. You know it's like it's very easy to work with lifestyle and sportswear etcetera. That's for the everyday consumer. If you can navigate in high fashion.

00:23:32 Speaker 2

It is a very particular consumer that you are the face of a brand for, you know, and that brand has people that buy their product

00:23:45 Speaker 2

And have done so for a long time and spend a lot of money on it, so it's important for them that they work with people that they feel like can really do that job, but also for the artist to know that you're getting a new audience. There's so many artists that I've seen like at Vogue events.

00:24:04 Speaker 2

And you're speaking in a completely new space and that speaks into a different audience, whether that be art or do, you know, mean other cultural or spaces that you couldn't reach?

00:24:17 Speaker 2

And I think that that is really exciting, especially if an artist is up for that and wants to explore that it can have endless opportunities. Yeah. Where, like, you know, Skepta's now doing things with Sotheby's, you know, like, would you have thought that five years ago, 10 years ago? Probably not.

00:24:36 Speaker 1

Interesting. So does luxury open doors for artists to get to reach new; is it demographics?

00:24:48 Speaker 2

Yeah, completely new audience. A completely new audience and that audience.

00:24:54 Speaker 2

Is very very

00:24:56 Speaker 2

hard to reach.

00:24:59 Speaker 2

They don't get, you know, they're not, you know, to sell to a luxury consumer. It's very different.

00:25:05 Speaker 2

So it's a consumer that has to buy into the vision. You know, because they really have to spend. You don't have products that are the products are not cheap.

00:25:14 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:25:15 Speaker 2

It's not a throw away.

00:25:16 Speaker 1

Yeah, OK, cool. And do you think that UK rap artists influence luxury consumerism in London? For particularly millennials and Gen Z groups? And do UK rap artists influence trends as well to these groups in London, specifically in London?

00:25:39 Speaker 2

I think that they do influence that consumer. I think that that consumer is really now especially Gen. Z is really connected to, you know, being part of a trend. So what's that brand is a is a jewelry brand that is Van Cleef, that like the little.

00:25:59 Speaker 2

Like the little Clover, that's probably the most.

00:26:03 Speaker 2

Popular item of jewelry in the UK right now. Do you know what I mean, it's an aspirational piece of jewelry for most consumers. Do you know what I mean? It's like it's an example, especially like it was born from, like, the rap. You know, there's so many lyrics.

00:26:20 Speaker 2

You Google them.

00:26:21 Speaker 2

That that say that in the UK.

00:26:23 Speaker 2

And then it's like, I feel like that is a really that showed me the influence of something on.

00:26:32 Speaker 2

For music to that.

00:26:33 Speaker 2

Consumer because everyone started buying it after like.

00:26:38 Speaker 2

You know, like so I've seen everyone with it; every single artist has that bloody necklace and bracelet, you know, like it's you can't escape it, but it's a consumer. They are happy to follow each other. Whereas I feel which is beneficial absolutely for both the brand.

00:26:58 Speaker 2

And for the artist, but

00:27:01 Speaker 2

I came from a bit more of a generation where people would have a bit more of an individual identity, but in terms of like it working, it works. You know, I think that they have generally like to be in a trend they like. They think that they're really like.

00:27:20 Speaker 2

Above it, but they're in a trend. They all want to have that common thing that they have.

00:27:26 Speaker 2

That unifies them.

00:27:28 Speaker 2

You know, so it's like there's always every season, a product that everyone wants to get or wants to have or wants to, you know, be seen with and that luxury product always. And they all kind of, like, want to get it, want to source it.

00:27:47 Speaker 2

Need to be part of it so.

00:27:49 Speaker 2

Yeah. I do believe so.

00:27:50 Speaker 1

OK. OK, thank you. That's really interesting how you put it. And do you think that the authentic Black British experience communicates through lyrics which involve aspirational connotations of luxury brands or products? And do they fuel luxury consumerism?

00:28:10 Speaker 1

Or make people aspire, especially among the black youth in Britain.

00:28:17 Speaker 2

Yeah, that's the area that I that I struggle with a little bit because I'm like, why do you wanna spend all your money on something that?

00:28:26 Speaker 2
you don't need like, it's not that deep.
00:28:28 Speaker 2
Do you know what I mean?
00:28:29 Speaker 2
But it's so like, you know, like when the lyrics really paint the picture. Like if you go into, like rap lyrics, UK rap lyrics, it's like it's always about, like, you know, certain items, particular items, a particular jacket, a particular, you know, watch
00:28:46 Speaker 2
To a particular wallet, you know, and then
00:28:49 Speaker 2
It's like you have these
00:28:51 Speaker 2*
You know, and the black consumers are really, you know, a lot of people came from nothing. So when you think about the poverty line of Black Britain, it is still quite low. So you'll probably know more about it than I do. But ultimately,
00:29:11 Speaker 2
You're getting people to - you as an artist are getting people to use all their money to buy the thing that is important to you and that knock on affect it means that there's a generation of people that are struggling to keep up. You know, there's, you know, they're struggling to keep up. You know, we say a lot in our youth groups.
00:29:31 Speaker 2
Like you just don't have to. Don't worry about it. But they're always talking about the things they need to get, which are always consumer based products, you know what I mean, it's just like stuff to
00:29:43 Speaker 2
Have, so I struggle with it because I feel like is that the best use of like
00:29:49 Speaker 2*
all the money you have, but I also understand that you know, when you when you have nothing.
00:29:57 Speaker 2*
It's a status
00:29:58 Speaker 2
Symbol to have something nice. You know, it's nice to have nice things and aspire and feel like that's aspirational and
00:30:05 Speaker 2

Maybe it does.

00:30:05 Speaker 2

Maybe drive people to work harder, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. But I don't necessarily personally agree with it. I just think that that isn't the best way to approach life but I understand that cause I do know.

00:30:17 Speaker 2

People that work very hard because they wanna get a pair of Prada glasses or, like, these are specific products that's, you know, Stormzy had these glasses on or Dave wore that, you know what I mean

00:30:30 Speaker 2

They just want to be part of it, but then they're all like, you know, it's not for your for the subject matter for you. But there are brands like

00:30:38 Speaker 2

Corteiz whose opposite to luxury that is, like providing the opposite with that consumer as well, so I'm happy that that exists too.

00:30:48 Speaker 1

Interesting. And also you know cause Cortez it's it's not a luxury brand, but it seems like people really aspire. Does it make it like a luxury brand?

00:30:58 Speaker 2

It’s exclusive. It’s exclusive.

00:31:04 Speaker 2

He's made it exclusive.

00:31:06 Speaker 2

He's made his brand for like, if you miss out, You're gonna miss out. Everyone buys it. He always mixes

00:31:14 Speaker 3

His products with luxury products.

00:31:17 Speaker 2

And he says.

00:31:17 Speaker 2

Like I'm the cool thing in your look.

00:31:20 Speaker 2

You know, everything else can be generic.

00:31:22 Speaker 2

This one thing is going to be the thing that is a cool item in

00:31:25 Speaker 2

Your whole look and it really goes back to that. What I did about that Uptown downtown thing,* it's really something that Supreme - I worked with Supreme for a long time and they kind of invented that.
00:31:34 Speaker 1
Yes, I remember.
00:31:35 Speaker 1
You said at your talk at converse, the Converse Hotel thing that you were talking about that.
00:31:42 Speaker 2*
Yeah. So it's like that Supreme Uptown downtown thing*. It's like, you know, you can, you know, Supreme makes plates that cost 15 grand sometimes, like, this is.
00:31:51 Speaker 2
Crazy, but you know someone's
00:31:53 Speaker 2
Gonna buy it.
00:31:53 Speaker 2
So, yeah, I think Cortez is. I'm happy that he's speaking for that market and he's made this exclusivity that Supreme had as well. So not this minimum
00:32:04 Speaker 2
Number of products.
00:32:06 Speaker 2
Of one day only drop and that's the only time you can get it. So almost like people, you know the.
00:32:11 Speaker 2
Value of it is irrelevant because you have everyone trying to hit it as in the value, meaning the price is irrelevant because it's valuable regardless, cause everyone wants it.
00:32:17 Speaker 1
OK, OK.
00:32:24 Speaker 2
So is luxury just based on like the quality of the product, or is it a mindset?
00:32:31 Speaker 1
Interesting. That is that is something definitely to explore for sure.
00:32:36 Speaker 1
OK. And Ohh first of all I have the normal zoom account so it's saying that I have 6 minutes so you could just if it ends just refresh the link. But we have 7 questions left. Is that OK with you?
00:32:52 Speaker 2
Yeah, we're in we're on a role now.

00:32:54 Speaker 1

OK. OK. Right. So the next question is, is UK rap a representation of the African diaspora through its intersection with luxury brands? And if so, what are the effects of this for black youth?

00:33:13 Speaker 1

In your opinion?

00:33:17 Speaker 2

I think that is a bit of both actually, I think the luxury consumer in Africa is bigger than the one in the UK, and having seen it a bit closer like.

00:33:27 Speaker 2

Africa, like African level of luxury, is unmatched because it's really in the everyday. It's like it comes with all levels of luxury. It means that A-Z is luxury from the sheets on your bed to.

00:33:44 Speaker 2

lunch at Harrods to where you shop to what you buy to where you eat. And I just came back to Nigeria for the first time, like 11

00:33:54 Speaker 2

Years ago.

00:33:54 Speaker 2

But from what? How I interacted with my real Nigerian, do you know what I mean?

00:34:01 Speaker 2

Luxury, friends, relatives, etcetera. It's just a whole different class. It's like it's very, very real. And I feel like when you look even like

00:34:11 Speaker 2

And I'm not saying that UK rap isn't luxurious, but I'm just gonna make a comparison here between like, if you look at who's the top people in UK rap maybe arguably, Skepta, Stormzy, Dave, Central Cee and then you look at luxury and Afro beats and you see Burna boy, Davido, Wizkid.

00:34:31 Speaker 2

Do you know what I mean, Rema; who looks more expensive?

00:34:37 Speaker 2

Do you know what I mean? Who looks like they are really spending money?

00:34:39 Speaker 2

Who's flying like a private jet everyday, who's you know, like, there's no compromise on luxury. There's, like, there's A-Z. You'll never see them on a commercial plane.

00:34:54 Speaker 2

You'll never see them outside of a five star hotel whereas I feel like British people we're, we compromise a little bit more. We're like, OK, this is good enough. You know, this is fine, you know. I mean, whereas Africa demands is like, if I'm, If I'm making it, I'm making it.

00:35:01 Speaker 1

OK.

00:35:12 Speaker 2

And the.

00:35:13 Speaker 2

Questionable with the level of luxury that I'm going to be claiming now, so I just think it's a completely different thing. But I do believe that the influence of the taste in luxury.

00:35:18 Speaker 1

OK.

00:35:21 Speaker 1

OK.

00:35:28 Speaker 2

The UK definitely guided that the African diaspora and consumer on that. When you think about brands that are really big in the African diaspora from Louis Vuitton now are under the guises of the, you know.

00:35:43 Speaker 2

Virgil, Or or.

00:35:45 Speaker 2

Pharrell and like Casablanca, that's huge in Africa. Massive. But that's because like all the like, UK guys were wearing it, they were wearing it like in summer. They wore it to like Wimbledon. They wore it to, you know what I mean, so it's like, really.

00:35:50 Speaker 1

MM.

00:36:03 Speaker 2

Having the lifestyle part of fashion.

00:36:07 Speaker 2

Luxury fashion is dictated from the UK, but the buying power I think comes from the African diaspora. But the lifestyle and style like you know it's it doesn't matter, Skepta is a style icon.

00:36:14 Speaker 3

OK.

00:36:22 Speaker 2

He has the best style, all of the artists, no matter how much money they have, will still say he's a style icon. They look at him for style, they'll see what he's wearing. Do you know what I mean, he has that influence, you know?

00:36:36 Speaker 1

Interesting. OK. Interesting. So what are your views on street wear then in the luxury intersection within UK rap and how do you feel it differs from US rap and what the what are the differences in that within that intersection?

00:37:15 Speaker 1

What is your view on that?

00:37:17 Speaker 2

Yeah, I.

00:37:17 Speaker 2

Think that's a

00:37:18 Speaker 2

In terms of street wear you've gotta remember that, you know, top boy, let's talk about top boy. Top boy. The American's just clocked on to top boy. They're just like this is crazy to them. They can't believe it. How does this happen?

00:37:38 Speaker 2

How do they dress like this? It's like a it's literally like a parody to them. And like, this is real, you know, but.

00:37:45 Speaker 2

Essentially, that uniform of streetwear, we've always had in the UK, like that grey comp tracksuit that Nike Town look. Do you know what I mean; that cosy winter, you know, like, you know what that is with the dog going around London, we know that look that aesthetics lived with us for the last since that, you know, the early 2000s.

00:38:05 Speaker 2

So I feel like the street wear is inherently more relevant to us because we see it in our everyday; I actually made a film.

00:38:15 Speaker 2

For Nike, about about the the influence of the Air Max shoe because I feel like that and that uniform, it's like we had a uniform in the UK.

00:38:36 Speaker 1

Why is it not

00:38:40 Speaker 1

Grace, if you can hear me, maybe let's refresh the link because I can't hear you anymore for some reason.

00:42:33 Speaker 2

Hey, I'm so sorry. The power came off.

00:42:35 Speaker 3

Oh, no, don't worry about it.

00:42:37 Speaker 3

Don't worry about it.

00:42:40 Speaker 1

Hello. Hi.

00:42:42 Speaker 2

Sorry, the power cut off

00:42:47 Speaker 1

No worries, no worries.

00:42:48 Speaker 1

Thank you so much for coming back. Also the link expired so.

00:42:53 Speaker 1

And it was probably good timing with the power.

00:42:57 Speaker 1

So where were we? I think. Oh, yeah, we were talking about the differences between UK rap and US RAP and streetwear.

00:43:09 Speaker 2

Yes. So streetwear, we were talking about.

00:43:13 Speaker 2

The UK kind of top boy feeling and why that's important, whereas the

00:43:19 Speaker 2

US didn't really have that. They had more like.

00:43:23 Speaker 2

Their street wear was more.

00:43:26 Speaker 2

I don't know how to describe it. I would say when I think of streetwear I think of like.

00:43:34 Speaker 2

Comfort, like easy to wear, like you know what I mean, a functional way of wearing clothes. Whereas I think that the US one, it's more like.

00:43:45 Speaker 2

Out there, it's more like.

00:43:49 Speaker 2

It was definitely way more exaggerated. It was over.

00:43:53 Speaker 2

The top almost.

00:43:54 Speaker 2

So I just think that there's a different thing. So I feel like the streetwear again, that's why I feel like a brand like Corteiz does really well in the

00:44:02 Speaker 2

UK because it is really relatable to the everyday, it's something that people feel like.

00:44:09 Speaker 2

Was part of their growing up, whereas in the US, although you do have like huge brands like Supreme or.

00:44:17 Speaker 2

Stussy, etcetera.

00:44:19 Speaker 2

Umm, that's really way more connected to skateboarding, whereas here in the UK it's kind of just connected all around.

00:44:28 Speaker 2

I forgot what your question I exactly was but.

00:44:32 Speaker 1

No, I think you've you've answered, but I wanted to build on that and ask you whether you think luxury brands note that relatability.

00:44:41 Speaker 2

Yeah, that's why, like, think about Louis Vuitton doing a collaboration with Supreme like remember what that changed Louis Vuitton and Supreme worked on something together, they wanted to connect with like that more relevant younger consumer. Do you what I mean, everyday, you know what I mean people that are way a little bit cooler.*

00:45:01 Speaker 2

You know a bit more.

00:45:03 Speaker 2

You know, you know, luxury is also like as much as it can.

00:45:07 Speaker 2

Be on this side within our UK rap culture and rap culture at large. It's also at a completely different consumer, which is not as cool and not as celebrity driven as not as gisty as I my aunt would say, but.
00:45:23 Speaker 2*
I feel like when you connect that luxury and street
00:45:28 Speaker 2
You get that Uptown, downtown aesthetic that I think a lot of people aspire for*. They wanna buy designers, but they also wanna be cool. You know, you want to be cool. You want someone to say ohh, that's really cool.* So it was kind of like it was worth the money, right? Yeah, it was worth it. Cause of the compliments. People. When people say that women dress for women.
00:45:49 Speaker 2
That's true. You know, it's like, you want someone to say, like, oh, you look nice, you know? So, as I said, thinking in that streetwear luxury space works like.*
00:46:00 Speaker 2*
Ohh this is like cool because it's like a.
00:46:03 Speaker 2
Little bit more.
00:46:03 Speaker 2*
Accessible, you know? So it's like, yes, you've got, it's clearly, it's luxury but you're still cool and that is huge. That's a huge market that I don't think people kind of have tapped into enough
00:46:22 Speaker 1
Interesting. And So what are your views on lyrics?
00:46:27 Speaker 1
Mentioning of luxury brand names in lyrics and is it product placement or is it purely aspirational or them talking about asserting and attaining to get these certain brands of products?
00:46:40 Speaker 2
Yeah, I I think it's a bit braggy and aspirational. It's like you want people to know how much money you've got and you want people to think that your references are cool*. So you might reference an AP watch over a.
00:46:54 Speaker 2
Rolex because you think it's a little bit more of a niche or you might reference, you know what I mean,
00:47:00 Speaker 2
Ferragamo over over.
00:47:05 Speaker 2

Gucci because it's probably gonna speak to a more niche taste and it makes you a little bit more edgy, you know? So I think it's a bit of, I think it's a bit of like showing your wealth, but also showing your taste.

00:47:18 Speaker 2*

Like am I cool?

00:47:26 Speaker 1

And so I saw on your Instagram IG and your bio, you say you're a cultural curator. Could you build on that? How so? Is it that you curate scenes and?

00:47:43 Speaker 1

Campaigns or videos with the with black culture in mind, and then how do you think that there are cultural and societal impacts of UK raps interconnection within what you do?

00:48:02 Speaker 2

I make culture feel

00:48:05 Speaker 2

Accessible to people. You know, I feel like I want people to be able to interact with culture that is important to me, primarily black culture. You know, like it's important that it is respected, you know, and when I mean curator, it's almost like I can just find a way to communicate it.

00:48:25 Speaker 2

Better than anyone else, you know, like I know how to communicate it.

00:48:29 Speaker 2

In a way, you know, arguably you can say that Nigeria I played a role in Nigeria's communication. I worked on the Nigeria jersey and I was able to communicate that product to everybody in a way that.

00:48:43 Speaker 2

Unified the nation and non Nigerians. Do you know what I mean, so I was able to.

00:48:49 Speaker 2

Something that is very trivial or take that but also add music into their, you know, like Not3s was in that notes was in that campaign and Wiz Kid. And do you know what I mean? Like adding like culturally relevant things and that's

00:49:04 Speaker 2

How you can kind of curate that moment, curate that vision.

00:49:11 Speaker 1

And through your cultural curation, where do you see UK raps, intersection with luxury fashion, and do you feel that it contributes to, you know, a unity of identities?

00:49:24 Speaker 1

Of black identities, whether it's from Nigeria to the UK to the Black British youth.

00:49:32 Speaker 1

What do you think about that?

00:49:37 Speaker 2

So just restate the question for me, sorry.

00:49:40 Speaker 2

Just so I can understand.

00:49:41 Speaker 1

So do you think that there are cultural and societal impacts of UK raps intersection with luxury fashion? And if you do, what are they and how do they contribute to?

00:49:56 Speaker 1

Unity of identities.

00:49:59 Speaker 2

I'm not sure I fully understand the question. Can you just sort of break it down a little bit more for me? I don't really. So what are you

00:50:06 Speaker 2

Saying you're saying?

00:50:09 Speaker 1

So I'm asking if you feel that in the relationship between UK rap and luxury fashion one, if there are cultural and societal impacts. And two, if there's an effect on identities, does it bring identities together?

00:50:30 Speaker 1

For example, at your homecoming events, I've seen that you've you have UK rap artists there and you also have Nigerian artists.

00:50:38 Speaker 1

That could possibly indicate that there's a unity of identities.

00:50:44 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah. OK. So how does that relate to fashion?

00:50:53 Speaker 2

I think.

00:51:08 Speaker 2

A definitely think

00:51:09 Speaker 2

That there's a.

00:51:10 Speaker 2

There's a there's a connection between like UK rap, kind of what I said with Skepta influencing the African diaspora. Yeah, I feel like there is a connection there.

00:51:24 Speaker 2

From music or from, you know, just identity or like, you know, I was talking a.

00:51:31 Speaker 2

Lot about today.

00:51:32 Speaker 2

About home like feeling like you belong somewhere. So the reason that Skepta works so well with the African diaspora is because he's Nigerian British, so he understands both sides, you know what I mean so that works

00:51:45 Speaker 2

You're not just, you know, as much as we are British, we are also we are come from other places. So I think that that definitely has a

00:51:56 Speaker 2

Bigger, is a bigger conversation, but I do think it plays a role and even if you think about like Caribbean culture and like Jamaican culture, dancehall culture and Drake, you know, Drake may as well be British. But.

00:52:12 Speaker 2

Like you know, the influence of like that on him on, you know that both ways around like it's it's been quite interesting to watch that kind of like.

00:52:24 Speaker 2

Conversation between Jamaica and music again.

00:52:28 Speaker 2

From the diaspora lens, you know? So, but I don't know if I can fully answer a question, so I don't know.

00:52:34

No, no, no.

00:52:34 Speaker 1

You've you've answered it.

00:52:35 Speaker 1

You've answered it even just with the example of how Skepta is as much as he's British, he's a Nigerian and then the effects of that reaching to domains and being relatable to two domains. So yeah.

00:52:53 Speaker 1

UM, and I think you've already answered #11 earlier. So what do you think? Do you feel like there is cultural wealth from Black Britain within luxury fashion, within the luxury fashion sector?

00:53:14 Speaker 1

Cultural wealth, the contributions of the African diaspora within the luxury sphere.

00:53:23 Speaker 2*

Yeah, I think there is. But I think it's displaced, like that's why I always think that.

00:53:27 Speaker 2*

Like if we can.

00:53:29 Speaker 2*

Back like a brand like Mowalola in the same way that we.

00:53:33 Speaker 2*

Back a brand like Louis Vuitton or Burberry, we'll have a real conversation with that, you know what I mean, because I think that the power is there, the power is.

00:53:44 Speaker 2*

The you know the money is there. I just feel like we could do better at making sure that we see this vision 360. We're never in the position of ownership in that equation. So we're always just spending. We're

00:54:01 Speaker 2*

Not building any

00:54:02 Speaker 2*

Wealth. You know we're not building.

00:54:04 Speaker 2*

Any back end wealth

00:54:08 Speaker 2*

What luxury brand is owned by someone of colour?

00:54:12 Speaker 2*

That is doing, that is extremely successful. You know, there's not, there's, there's not. I can't tell you there's any

00:54:22 Speaker 1

Does Mowlola own

00:54:23 Speaker 1

Her brand because I would deem that as a luxury brand.

00:54:27 Speaker 2*

Yes, she does own it, but it it's. Yeah, it's not there yet. She's getting there. But definitely yes, she does own it. She does own her. But there was Virgil. There's her. There's Martine Rose. There's, you know, there's Grace Wales Bonner. There's a handful of people that if we wanted to, we could really.

00:54:48 Speaker 2*

Empower their brands, you know, like and put and bring bring that wealth.

00:54:54 Speaker 2*

To back almost 360, so I'd love to see more of that.

00:55:00 Speaker 1

OK. And through our homecoming, I mean, you've created a space in which the diaspora can connect with their roots and

00:55:12 Speaker 1

UK rap artists from the African diaspora, as well as luxury brands; I've seen the pop ups you have where you've had Casablanca. You also had off-white at some point and so could you. Please share some insights on how that interconnection between UK rap and luxury fashion has been present in terms of the

00:55:31 Speaker 1

Fashion side, so you have a pop up in Lagos. Are people buying into brands because of the influence that they've seen?

00:55:40 Speaker 1

On the UK rap scene? Or is it just that they have the awareness of these brands and they just want to attain those brands

00:55:48 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think I think you've gotta remember that

00:55:51 Speaker 2

You know the youth population in Nigeria alone is 100 million people and like they are all they are online. So our impact you know what's the population of the UK, the black population of UK is 3%. It's tiny. Nigeria is the most populous black nation.

00:56:11 Speaker 2

You know what I mean?

00:56:11 Speaker 2

Like influence is way bigger, so they have more

00:56:16 Speaker 2

You know, that's why, like Someone Like You know, Wiz Kid can have much more reach. But to talk about, about the fashion, I think what I liked most about it is that we were bringing luxury brands like Off-White to collaborate with local, you know, African brands like Motheran.

00:56:36 Speaker 2

Or like you know, like getting these people to collaborate with each other, you know, and like, exchange there. That was interesting to me. And that's why I miss people like Virgil because I was like, you know what?

00:56:48 Speaker 2

We were experimenting in such a way we had people like Denim Tears come and we have people like, you know, Patta to collaborate. Yes, it's more streetwear, but it's still something that is important to start that conversation of exchange and like it gives people an entry point into getting into the continent in a way that they know.

00:57:09 Speaker 2

You know, they get into it in the way that, you know, we had. We've had Dave here. We've had people come; but the entry point Homecoming gives between because of the off-white T-shirt or because of the Casablanca shorts. Do you know what I mean? It's an entry point and it's a really important.

00:57:24 Speaker 2

And you know, so I always feel like fashion is an entry point to a conversation, and it's may seem difficult to people, but we have to accept what what it is, you know, it's like, yes, that that kids consume stuff they want to like, they love drip. They wanna look good. They care about brands. If I can get people to.

00:57:43 Speaker 2

Africa because I can curate a few things around that I'm winning. You know? That's cool.

00:57:51 Speaker 1

And so while managing Skepta, have you?

00:57:54 Speaker 1

How how pivotal or how key have luxury brands been? I know you know in the beginning when he talked about throwing Louis Vuitton in the bin how has how has now that changed that shift to now it being so fundamental in who he is as an artist?

00:58:14 Speaker 1

Would you say that luxury brands and or his association with the luxury brands has contributed to his progression as a personality, not even just as an artist?

00:58:28 Speaker 2

I think it’s helped position him better like.

00:58:30 Speaker 2

You've gotta think about, like, you know, you can get positioned in fashion and luxury through different ways. Like, you know, he did that cover shoot with GQ with Naomi Campbell for his own brand Mains. That was really important. That speaks to him being in a luxury space now.

00:58:39 Speaker 1

Yes, yes.

00:58:48 Speaker 2

You know, he was able to, you know, work with Burberry, like, do that, you know, like with Daniel Lee that it just it just takes you into a completely different.

00:59:00 Speaker 2

World and it allows that world to accept you. And it's all interconnected because.

00:59:05 Speaker 2

If he can.

00:59:06 Speaker 2

Work. If he's good enough for Burberry, then it's good enough for Sotheby's. If he's good enough for Sotheby's then he is good enough for Christies if it's good enough.

00:59:12 Speaker 2

For Christies then it's

00:59:13 Speaker 2

Good enough for Rolls Royce, do you know what I mean.

00:59:15 Speaker 2

Then it's just.

00:59:15 Speaker 2*

Like a ripple effect. And he also has the downtown.

00:59:19 Speaker 2

Edge. He's never going to lose.

00:59:21 Speaker 2

Who he is.

00:59:21 Speaker 2

So it's almost like able to navigate a very interesting space where.

00:59:29 Speaker 2

Luxury and street and almost rap culture collide.

00:59:35 Speaker 2

Do you know what I mean.

00:59:35 Speaker 2

But it seems effortless seems seamless.

00:59:40 Speaker 2

Though, but not ever, not meant. Not everyone can do that. That was really based on his.

00:59:46 Speaker 2

His unique point of like really having tastes really knowing him, what he likes. You know, it's a lot of looking at what is authentic and I say authenticity again. So I think that, yeah, I think it's definitely played a role in how his brand has been.

01:00:01 Speaker 2

Received as well.

01:00:25 Speaker 1

OK and.

01:00:28 Speaker 1

As a cultural.

01:00:29 Speaker 1

Curator and the founder of Metallic Ink and Our Homecoming, how pivotal our luxury are the luxury brands you work with specifically.

01:00:43 Speaker 2

How important that they are really important. They're like, they allow us to amplify voices.

01:00:49 Speaker 2

Like from working with a luxury band, they can amplify someone's voice, and that's all I want to do. I want to be a platform where people that are great, exceptional people get to

01:01:01 Speaker 2

Grow their audience.

01:01:03 Speaker 2

So I think.

01:01:04 Speaker 2

That luxury plays a key role in.

01:01:06 Speaker 2

That because it allows you to speak to.

01:01:10 Speaker 2

People that you know, I always say to my dad always said to me, speak to people at their level, but if you can navigate that you're you're on the same level as people, you know, whoever that is, that it's

not about money. It's about, you know, taste. It's about references. It's about different things. And you can just, you know, Burna Boy can now

01:01:30 Speaker 2

Enter pretty much any room; I know, he's not British, but

01:01:34 Speaker 2

Because of all the campaigns he's done and that's really cool, I love that.

01:01:41 Speaker 1

And the last question, do you think that the UK rap artists are primarily gaining benefits from the relationship with the luxury brands, or is it luxury brands that get the benefits primarily?

01:02:11 Speaker 2

I think it's a mutually beneficial. Actually. I think that it's more beneficial for the

01:02:18 Speaker 2

For the luxury brand

01:02:21 Speaker 2

To associate themselves because it allows them to.

01:02:25 Speaker 2

Navigate a space they were irrelevant, you know what I mean, they get, they get a complete audience and then the audience buys and they they get adverts everywhere. People are wearing their stuff, you know that they're buying, you know, it's a, it's a hugely impactful space to play; rap music, you know. So I think that they get a lot

01:02:46 Speaker 2*

Out of it. And that's why I'm like that ownership. That's why I said that.

01:02:49 Speaker 2*

Ownership thing means something to

01:02:50 Speaker 2

Me, because it's like they're getting so much out of it. It's free advertisments.

01:02:54 Speaker 2

And the knock on effect like I wish it was promoting something that could be beneficial for generational wealth*

01:03:31 Speaker 2

Everyone wants to be part of like we live in a generation where people will, they'll have something once and they'll think they're the expert. So that works with fashion as well. They'll hear a brand once they'll look it up. They will do, you know, I mean, then they'll know it. They'll say, oh, yeah, I've seen that, you know, jacket in Harrods or Selfridges.

01:03:51 Speaker 2

And then someone's gonna buy it, and then It becomes a part of their universe. You know, it's very real. Yeah, it's very real.

01:04:04 Speaker 1

Oh, thank you so much. We've come to the end. Honestly, I'm so, so grateful.

01:04:14 Speaker 1

Thank you. So so, so much.

01:04:15 Speaker 2

No problem.

01:04:19 Speaker 2

My pleasure. Well, good luck.

01:04:21 Speaker 2

With everything, I hope it's amazing. I can't wait to read it.

01:04:23 Speaker 1

Thank you. I will definitely be reaching out.

01:04:33 Speaker 2

Well, congratulations, what you're doing is amazing.

01:04:36 Speaker 1

Thank you. Thank you so so much. Thank you. You have a lovely time in Lagos.

01:04:41 Speaker 2

My pleasure. Well, all the best.

01:04:43 Speaker 1

You too. Thank you so much. Thank you.

01:04:47 Speaker 2

Bye!

Appendix 3: Transcript of Interview with Nicole Vernon

Nicole Vernon Interview Transcription

Speaker 1: Researcher (Tiri Murai)

Speaker 2: Participant (Nicole Vernon)

Place of Interview: Hackney Downs Park

Duration of interview: 39:01

Date of interview: 06/10/2023

00:00:03 Speaker 1

Hi, Nicole, thank you so much for being willing to be interviewed for this PhD research. So if you can just state your name, and your job role and where you're based and confirm that you're OK with being interviewed and recorded

00:00:17 Speaker 2

Hi, my name is Nicole and I'm a stylist and creative researcher at Metallic Inc and I also work as Creative Director on the side.

00:00:30 Speaker 1

Amazing. Thank you so much.

00:00:33 Speaker 1

So the first question I have is; well, this PhD research is based on the interconnection between UK rap music and luxury fashion brands. From a stylist perspective and a creative directors perspective, what is your view on this interconnection?

00:00:50 Speaker 2

So I think it's a dynamic relationship where each side influences each other. On one side, luxury fashion is a visual language and in the rap scene it becomes a crucial tool for self-expression and storytelling

00:01:04 Speaker 2

And it's also like a canvas that allows artists to, like, put their narratives and showcase their narratives through their styles. And then from a stylist perspective, I think the interconnection between both can be viewed as a like symbiotic relationship and the stylist

00:01:24 Speaker 2

Often see's the this as an opportunity to create unique and visual looks, you know and.

00:01:34 Speaker 2

Sorry one second.

00:01:35 Speaker 2

And then.

00:01:39 Speaker 2

Oh yeah, that reflect the artist personal style, which is also incorporating elements of luxury fashion. And I think it's just a way to show fashion trends through the lens of an artist and also through the lens of a brand.

00:01:56 Speaker 1

Wow. Amazing. Thank you so much for sharing that. Let me just go back to the questions.

00:02:06 Speaker 1

So in your opinion, what is the relevance of the stylist role in the UK rap and luxury fashion intersection?

00:02:16 Speaker 2

So the stylist role in the UK rap and luxury intersection is like quite important because I see myself as a translator of artistic vision into visual language. My role is not just about picking clothes, it's more about.

00:02:36 Speaker 2

Curating an image that aligns with the artist's identity and resonates with the with the people.

00:02:45 Speaker 2

And the audience, one thing that is important for me is building a relationship with the artist and delving into the unique identity and understanding, understanding their story and what they want to tell to the people. So I genuinely love the process of getting to know them on a personal level.

00:03:06 Speaker 2

Learning about their preferences and understanding what makes them feel confident and also identifying their limits of their personality that they want to shine through in their image.

00:03:18 Speaker 2

So it's like essentially being a collaborator in their artistic journey, you know? And it's not just about fashion, it's also about understanding the artist vision and their cultural influences and the messages that they want to convey. So it's like a wonderful.

00:03:36 Speaker 2

Process to contribute to their visual storytelling, you know, and see how it resonates with their audience.

00:03:45 Speaker 1

Wow.

00:03:47 Speaker 2

I wrote like keywords but.

00:03:50 Speaker 2

I'm trying to say as much as I can so I don't forget.

00:03:52 Speaker 1

Thank you. No, thank you so much. That's a that's a really detailed answer.

00:03:57 Speaker 1

So the third question, you've styled Skepta before, among other rap artists and celebrities, what has been the relevance or importance of luxury brands when you have styled him or any other UK rapper? And is there ever a time where you've gone with the rapper's opinion on what they want to wear?
00:04:17 Speaker 1
Rather than your styling decision.
00:04:23 Speaker 2
Wait, sorry.
00:04:26 Speaker 2
Just because there's two questions.
00:04:39 Speaker 2
Yeah. OK. So luxury brands do bring a level of significance to the styling process, especially when working with artists like at a certain level like Skepta. It's not just about the.
00:04:52 Speaker 2
garments, it's about a cultural statement, and that the artists want to make, and I always make sure to
00:05:00 Speaker 2
have the artist's opinion and the statements that they want to make before mine, and I will make suggestions, but and I will prepare mood boards and select clothing, but they always have the last say and that is the main way to like, keep the authenticity of the person.
00:05:21 Speaker 2
Kind of their style and it's like a collaborative effort to deliver what the person wants and their vision cause at the end of the day it's their vision, not mine. But I'm just helping them deliver it. And like maybe like pushing the boundaries of what they want, you know.
00:05:42 Speaker 1
Thank you.
00:05:44 Speaker 2
Oh, I also had wrote down something.
00:05:51 Speaker 2
That when styling, for example, Skepta, the relevance and importance of luxury brands can be seen in many ways like first of all, they provide statements for Skepta's image that.
00:06:06 Speaker 2
But also it happens when he wears streetwear, so it's more about him rather than the brands, you know? And what about he wants to say?
00:06:16 Speaker 2

Like sometimes he might want to say that he is like, for example, if he wears Burberry, he wants to evoke a sense of British heritage, you know? But then if he wears a street wear brand he wants to
00:06:29 Speaker 2
Or like a
00:06:30 Speaker 2
UK brand he wants to show like his culture or heritage where he's from.
00:06:36 Speaker 2
Where he's lived, you know? So like, both sides bring a message. You know, it's not about.
00:06:42 Speaker 2
which one is better; It's about who he is and then secondly, the association with luxury brands can also open doors to like partnerships like things that are bigger. You know that will help him position himself as a style icon further you know, so like I think that would be the
00:07:02 Speaker 2
way that these brands like can actually collaborate with an artist at that level you know to take it further and
00:07:12 Speaker 2
I was going to say that obviously they carry prestige and exclusivity and when an artist wears the brands and it communicates success, sophistication and a connection to a certain lifestyle, you know, but from the thing I said before about how.
00:07:33 Speaker 2
An artist like Skepta can use this to like, do a brand partnership like I think like more brands should be doing brand partnerships with musicians, you know.
00:07:46 Speaker 2
Instead of just using them as like brand ambassadors, they should be doing further. You know, because it's like it shows how much they value the artist and what the artist is actually doing for them. You know, because a person won't just want to wear
00:08:03 Speaker 2
A luxury brand for no reason, like they're showing a message and they're also making thousands of people wear the brand, so like they should value that, you know.
00:08:17 Speaker 2
Like you know, they should value like the importance of the artist, you know. And they should be like, OK, well, maybe we need to partner with him, help him for, I don't know, like on his in on a personal level or in his music, you know, since he's giving us all of this, why don't we give him all of this too?
00:08:38 Speaker 2

You know.

00:08:40 Speaker 2

because many times with like smaller artists. It's just like, yeah, wear the clothes and you should be grateful for that. But in reality, you're also, you know.

00:08:50 Speaker 1

So with the big artist like Skepta, is it that thing of like

00:08:55 Speaker 1

You should be grateful to wear this?

00:08:58 Speaker 2

No. With the big artist, they understand. But I think they should even value it further. But with small artists I have seen many times where they're just like, Oh yeah, like just wear it. But in reality they don't understand all the importance that this person has or will have, you know.

00:09:04 Speaker 1

OK.

00:09:17 Speaker 2

So it's like they should at least make sure that they're like, you know.

00:09:23 Speaker 2

The transaction is fair, you know.

00:09:25 Speaker 1

OK. OK. Thank you for that. Let me just go to question 4.

00:09:34 Speaker 1

OK, so when choosing luxury brand products when styling a rap artist such as Skepta or whoever;

00:09:40 Speaker 1

You've styled Lancey Foux as well; so even someone like Lancey Foux who is not as big as Skepta, but has been really like climbing. Are there certain brands that you choose according to their aesthetic or does that not matter?

00:09:57 Speaker 2

So like brand selection is like very tailored to the artist aesthetic and like every luxury brand has its own story. So I I.

00:10:08 Speaker 2

I would say it's like mixing like kind of like ingredients you know, so it's like you kind of put things together to make like a certain flavor, you know? But you already know, like, the kind of things you have to put in, you know, and then

00:10:28 Speaker 2

Wait, I have another thing written down.

00:10:36 Speaker 2

Oh yeah, that. It's just like ensuring that like, you mix all the ingredients to get what the artist wants. You know, so like, and I always place the artist opinion before my own because it's their vision and I'm how happy to translate the vision and.

00:10:56 Speaker 2

I make suggestions and everything, but like at the end of the day they are the ones that choose, you know? Yeah. And but yeah, the question was more about selecting?

00:11:05 Speaker 1

Yeah. So when

00:11:06 Speaker 1

You're thinking of the brands; Let me just go back to the question.

00:11:14 Speaker 1

So you choose; you've said that you choose the brands according; it's tailored to their aesthetic, so does it matter?

00:11:22 Speaker 2

Yeah, especially with artists like Lancey and Skepta, like, those are the artists that I've worked with that have their aesthetic more defined and their story is very clear in their minds. So, you're essentially just facilitating

00:11:36 Speaker 2

like they already know what they want, you're just facilitating. In your vision, there's these things you know.

00:11:44 Speaker 1

So you're bringing, like, the garments; and you're helping make their vision come to life through garments and through brands?

00:11:49 Speaker 2

Yeah. And then, for example, like men, sometimes you can help them, like, push boundaries by saying, oh, there's this brand that's a bit different. But, you know, you might like it, you know, for them, I think it's so specific. And like, they obviously know what they want. So like, for me, that is.

00:12:08 Speaker 2

The like one of the best ways to work, but then there's also smaller artists that or like, even bigger artists that don't really know what they want. So that's when you really have the chance to like.

00:12:20 Speaker 2

Explore and you know, just like do whatever you want, but at the end of the day they always have to approve it anyway.

00:12:29 Speaker 1

So you're also introducing them; would you say you're introducing artists to new-

00:12:36 Speaker 1

Even though they know the brand, you're introducing them to new products of the brand?

00:12:39 Speaker 2

Yeah. Yeah, I think so. But I think like Skepta and Lancey are so specific like they'll know, oh, this item from this collection I wanted. Because they're so interlined with fashion and music and art like I would even say.

00:12:56 Speaker 2

They're not even; I would describe them as artists, not even rappers, you know, because they're so interlined.

00:13:06 Speaker 2

I think it's like they do music, but they're also so into fashion that they know to speak to me. They know what they want, you know? And they know they're informed about the latest season, you know.

00:13:18 Speaker 1

OK, OK. So it's not as simple as you just telling them?

00:13:24 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So that is like quite challenging, you know, because it's like they already know. Because they're so immersed.

00:13:32 Speaker 1

OK. And you say that you'd see them more as artists than rappers because of how they are; the duality of them being in the fashion world and music?

00:13:44 Speaker 2

And even Skepta now.

00:13:46 Speaker 2

Doing his brand as well, so it's like, it's like you're already. You're obviously like a music genius and then you're also a fashion icon and then now you're deejaying as well. And he paints!

00:14:01 Speaker 2

And I feel like Lancey is also like pretty much like that, you know?

00:14:11 Speaker 1

So are you saying you would coin them as multifaceted artists?

00:14:25 Speaker 2

Yes.

00:14:27 Speaker 1

OK, so that was number 4. So number 5, as a stylist, would you see yourself as a middleman between rap

00:14:48 Speaker 1

artists and luxury brands or an intermediary. So someone who is in the middle who's connecting the two?

00:14:56 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think I definitely see myself as an intermediary, especially because like I have to, like, speak to them to get the stuff that they want.

00:15:08 Speaker 2

Like I definitely am in the like bridging the gap between them and like I'm also ensuring that the

00:15:20 Speaker 2

Like the transaction is not just like about any type of clothing like I'm making sure that I'm picking something that aligns with the artist, whereas like usually the brand will just be like Oh yeah, we have all of these clothes, you know, yeah. Or like we have this like for example.

00:15:39 Speaker 2

A really colorful sweater for someone that only wears black, you know. So I need to make sure that whatever brands send is aligning with the artist vision, you know.

00:15:50 Speaker 1

OK, OK.

00:15:54 Speaker 2

I think.

00:15:59 Speaker 3

Oh yeah, I think that was it, but.

00:16:04 Speaker 1

So you say when you say them, you mean the brands like you're more so connecting; you're bridging the gap,

00:16:15 Speaker 1

But I want to understand is

00:16:18 Speaker 1

What is the priority, the artists vision?

00:16:24 Speaker 2

Yeah, like, definitely the artists' vision is in priority always, even when it's like a big partnership. I think it's important to make sure that the artist likes what they're wearing or.

00:16:38 Speaker 2

Has even chosen what they're wearing, because otherwise it's not

00:16:41 Speaker 2

Authentic, you know, and it doesn't really align with the artists. And then people don't really connect with it, you know.

00:16:47 Speaker 1

OK.

00:16:47 Speaker 3

Where that's why.

00:16:49 Speaker 2

So many partnerships now that you see are just like artists wearing things that they wouldn't usually wear. And it's not making much sense. So it doesn't really sell, you know, maybe a few people will buy it, but not everyone will be like.

00:17:02 Speaker 2

Oh yeah, I really want to get this jacket that you know.

00:17:07 Speaker 2

that someone wore one time, but you know that that's not his style, you know? So why would you buy it? You know, I think that's why I would go back to even Skepta or, like any artist, authenticity like, I think, for example, for Skepta it is so important, his authenticity, like, from the beginning, you know, and it's like.

00:17:27 Speaker 2

When selecting luxury brands for him, it's not about following trends or picking what's popular. It's aligning with his personal narrative and the messages he wants to convey.

00:17:39 Speaker 2

Yeah, like, I think just staying true to his story is the most important thing, you know? Otherwise there's a disconnect between his identity, you know, and the people, and I think.

00:17:52 Speaker 2

Just staying genuine between these partnerships makes it work, you know.

00:18:00 Speaker 1

OK.

00:18:01 Speaker 1

Thank you for that. So number six is, do you think UK rappers influence luxury consumers in London for millennial and Gen. Z groups and as a stylist, does this determine how you style the rap artist? So when you're styling artists, is it that you're thinking

00:18:22 Speaker 1

This will influence

00:18:25 Speaker 1

Consumer groups such as the millennial and Gen Z groups or is it just something that happens organically as a result of that? And if you think that there is an influence?

00:18:37 Speaker 1

Is that something that you take into consideration when you're styling artists?

00:18:43 Speaker 2

I mean definitely there is an influence, you know, like especially with like younger people and like upcoming artists. And like, I think like as a stylist, you need to be like tuned in to what's happening, who's coming up and like.

00:18:58 Speaker 2

All these things you know; the cultural shifts to like, get informed of style and like you know everything because like, whatever, whoever's coming up is bringing the new set of trends, you know, so it's always important to look out. And then I think like.

00:19:18 Speaker 2

When they embrace specific brands, that's like, you know, it's kind of like a cultural partnership, you know, because I think the artists are definitely trendsetters. And, like, shaping the taste of the people and.

00:19:36 Speaker 2

The preferences of their own fan base and the fan bases can be huge, you know, and I think like.

00:19:43 Speaker 2

That's when I had said that it's crucial that the luxury brands should really show how much they value artists, and they're working with and their influence because they're not just brand endorsers and they're like cultural architects, shaping trends and narratives.

00:20:02 Speaker 1

Interesting.

00:20:03 Speaker 2

I have to say

00:20:08 Speaker 2

That they can make genuine partnerships and not just transactional relationships because sometimes it feels very like you take this jacket. I take this picture, you know, but they can make genuine partnerships where the artists, you know, they help the artists, they support them with their

00:20:27 Speaker 2

Other initiatives they support them in Community projects, social causes, their own music. You know, like that adds depth to the relationship, you know, and I feel like there's a lot of brands that are doing that, you know, but there's still a lot of brands that just are very commercial in that sense.

00:20:48 Speaker 2

And I think it's like it really goes.

00:20:52 Speaker 2

Beyond fashion, their impact and like.

00:20:56 Speaker 2

Them being trendsetters like it's even.

00:21:00 Speaker 2

The cultural relevance, you know.

00:21:03 Speaker 1

So do you think about the youth, particularly millennial and Gen. Z groups when you're styling artists?

00:21:15 Speaker 2

I definitely think of the youth because.

00:21:19 Speaker 2

I think definitely that's what is even like that is going to be the fan base.

00:21:26 Speaker 2

You know, and you always want to stay in touch with them because those are even going to be the next listeners, you know, so it's like you have to stay in touch. But I think because you have the power to create.

00:21:40 Speaker 2

The trends you don't really have to look at what they're doing. You know, you just have to create something that grabs their attention, you know, so it's like.

00:21:50 Speaker 2

It's definitely; the way they're dressing is

00:21:57 Speaker 2

Like not for them, but it's going; They're going to take from it and dress similarly, you know, but it's we're not taking their style and putting it on to them, you know.

00:22:08 Speaker 1

OK

00:22:11 Speaker 2

But I think it definitely affects the younger people, the.

00:22:15 Speaker 2

OK, the people that don't really.

00:22:17 Speaker 2

Like they're forming their style in and they're looking up to people to form you know.

00:22:23 Speaker 1

So do you feel that artists; just building from what you've said, do you feel artists

00:22:29 Speaker 1

Contribute to fashion identities as well?

00:22:32 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, definitely.

00:22:37 Speaker 1

What other UK or African diaspora rap artists have you styled apart from Skepta?

00:23:09 Speaker 2

Lancey, Wizkid one time, Davido, Teezy, SARS, Lo Jay. For those people

00:23:16 Speaker 2

Everyone has been unique, you know, and like it's like very it's been very like niche, you know? So it's like very interesting that like within, like, certain spaces of music, there's like so many sub like you know

00:23:34 Speaker 2

like sub styles and like, it's interesting how everyone has their own approach to fashion and just like their visual language, you know how they want to present themselves to the people, you know?

00:23:49 Speaker 1

OK. Thank you. And when you style artists is product placement a factor and if so, when you style these artists such as Lancey Foux or Skepta, is the clothes that they wear used for product placement and commercial purposes or is it purely about what looks good?

00:24:10 Speaker 1

The trends, or simply what they like or what you think looks good as a stylist?

00:24:15 Speaker 2

I mean definitely for

00:24:19 Speaker 2

I think like for me and the way I work like usually, I never think of product placement because I think more about what looks good and the message we're trying to tell.* But then I have worked on a few commercial projects or like brand partnership projects where it is for a brand.

00:24:38 Speaker 2*

But still we try to be as subtle and as you know, authentic as we can, like even in the brand partnerships, we try to find things that like they would actually wear or things that you know align. But like otherwise apart

00:24:54 Speaker 2*

From that, we wouldn't try to position any brands

00:24:59 Speaker 1

So if, for example, there's a music video shoot and a Skepta is wearing Prada like for example, you styled that song.

00:25:08 Speaker 1

“I like the way she walk in the Prada”

00:25:10 Speaker 1

Was that something where you're like, OK, we have to put Prada for product placement?

00:25:20 Speaker 2

I definitely think.

00:25:28 Speaker 1

Or even if he just wears Prada, Is it about; Is it you just being like, OK, we have this or him saying ohh I wanted this Prada thing from the collection?

00:25:38 Speaker 2

I think what's really important is like listening; the best thing is getting to know the person that you're styling and that's why I think I'm quite particular with the people I style. Unless like it's like a commercial job because.

00:25:53 Speaker 2

I like getting to know the person and then knowing the things that they like, you need to really like get submerged in their world, you know and like, think and you have to really pay attention to their lyrics, to the things they say. Like even on a shoot. I know if they're speaking about something they like, I write it down, you know.

00:26:14 Speaker 2

Because I know that I can, you know, implement that in the next, the next time we work together, you know, so definitely I already knew of the fact that there's a few brands that he likes working with. So, I know that that is.

00:26:28 Speaker 2

Like his favorite, you know? Then I can ask him about stuff and, like, dialogue about other things, but I definitely pay attention to see what I can see in his lyrics or anywhere you know

00:26:41 Speaker 1*

So it doesn't mean that you using that is product placement. It's because he actually likes it?

00:26:45 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, because he genuinely wants to wear it for sure. Like, I think him especially he would.

00:26:52 Speaker 2*

He never wants to product place unless it's something that he wants, you know, you know. And yeah, unless it's a brand that he really likes, he would rather not even put it on, you know.

00:27:04 Speaker 1

OK. Interesting, interesting.

00:27:07 Speaker 2

And I think a lot of artists that know what they want are.

00:27:10 Speaker 2

Like that, you know.

00:27:10 Speaker 1

OK. And what would you say are the most used or favorite luxury brands by rap artists from the UK that you've worked with and when you source for clothes

00:27:23 Speaker 1

Or when you're sourcing for these clothes, for music videos or shoots, what are

00:27:27 Speaker 1

The most;

00:27:28 Speaker 1

the favorite or the high in demand brands that you would say?

00:27:33 Speaker 2*

I think definitely Givenchy, Alyx, Bottega, Prada, Burberry

00:27:45 Speaker 2*

Louis Vuitton, Nike

00:27:52 Speaker 2*

I think like those are like the ones that you know, like the most in demand you know.

00:27:59 Speaker 1

So even though Nike isn’t a luxury brand, why do you feel that it's popular among artists?

00:28:13 Speaker 2*

I think it's more about the cultural relevance and I think that's why it's important to know.

00:28:19 Speaker 2

That, like you know, like there's artists that like, I don't know, it's more about the message of the clothing. So like, you can wear Nikes

00:28:29 Speaker 2

That you can wear a bottega suit. And what are you saying? You know, it's like you're from the UK, you know, but like, you might wear an air Max. But then you're wearing a bottega suit because you're trying to show off a lifestyle. You know, it's like there's so many little messages throughout the things that you're wearing.

00:28:50 Speaker 2

You know.

00:28:51 Speaker 2

Like you're, you might say that you're daring because you're wearing, you know, leather trousers. Or you might say that, you know, you're a bit dark because you have, like, you know, spikes, you know what I mean? Like, I think you're just, like, trying to make a world with messaging.

00:29:04 Speaker 1

OK. Interesting.

00:29:11 Speaker 2

And that world and the messages come through clothes as well, you know.

00:29:16 Speaker 1

OK. OK. Interesting. Thank you. So we're at question number 10.

00:29:20 Speaker 1

Where does authenticity; and you've spoken about authenticity a lot already. But just for your opinion, where does authenticity and the authentic black British experience lay when styling? Or where is it placed when you're styling artists; and as a stylist, is this something you communicate?

00:29:41 Speaker 1

And does communicating aspirations through curating clothes and imagery play a role as a stylist?

00:29:47 Speaker 2

I mean, I think it's definitely like a responsibility to like keep, you know, certain cultural elements and like, you know.

00:29:59 Speaker 2*

Like black, the black experience into the clothing because it's like you should never ignore that side. You know the same way you're trying to communicate things like if that is part of who you are, you should communicate that as well. So I think, like, definitely communicate.

00:30:20 Speaker 2

The aspirations and like the heritage of the person is important, you know, and it's about their narrative and their story. So I think.

00:30:31 Speaker 2*

Definitely selecting pieces that you know for example, like Martine Rose, the brand, you know like I think like things or like even like using vintage T-shirts that have like any messaging you know or you know like maybe we've watched the movie that's about like, you know.

00:30:51 Speaker 2*

That is just culturally relevant for us as black people.* Then I like maybe take styling inspiration from that, you know? So I think it's like always important to take certain elements and like, put them in as like to give even more importance to what you're trying to say, you know.

00:31:10 Speaker 1

OK.

00:31:11 Speaker 2

Like I really liked. I think it was Kendrick, but he was wearing a lot of Martine Rose lately, and I know that he it's because he's aligning with her thinking as a brand, you know? So it's like what? What is he trying to say with that? You know, it's always nice to look at other artists and see.

00:31:31 Speaker 2

Ohh, you're wearing this brand, but why? You know? Yeah, because I know he's a more thought out artist, so I know there's reasoning behind it. And Martine Rose isn't like, you know, a commercial brand. So there's reasoning, you know.

00:31:45 Speaker 1

Interesting, that's

00:31:46 Speaker 1

That's a really interesting answer. So, who leads a project you as a stylist or the rap artist in terms of what clothing will be worn?

00:31:56 Speaker 2

Definitely them.

00:32:00 Speaker 2

Like obviously like I think.

00:32:05 Speaker 2

Because you're working for them like it's always gonna be them. But it's important to find the balance where you're also heard and like they hear you out

00:32:20 Speaker 1

Do you style a rap artist based on his or her lyrics for music videos, for instance? As we mentioned earlier, if the lyrics mention Prada, will you feature Prada in the video?

00:32:33 Speaker 2

I think definitely important to like, look at the lyrics and you know it's like.

00:32:41 Speaker 2*

It becomes part of the creative story you have to bring it in, especially if it's like a music video and you're, you know, you have to really go into telling a story. I think that's when my side of like wanting to do creative direction comes in because, you know, it's more about telling stories rather than just the clothes

00:33:02 Speaker 2

And then I think it's just

00:33:06 Speaker 2

Getting to know the artist, studying his story and like using references*, you know.

00:33:11 Speaker 1

OK, OK. And these references are varied from different influences?

00:33:16 Speaker 2

Yeah, but also some of them might come from him or his lyrics,* you know, and it's like, important to add layers of depth to whatever we do in style, you know.

00:33:28 Speaker 2*

It gives a bit of substance and it's just like fun.

00:33:32 Speaker 2*

To do clever references and for people to find like little Easter eggs, you know if, like, if I'm watching a video and someone is saying.

00:33:41 Speaker 2

Oh, she wears Burberry. And I see her in burberry. I'm like, oh, you know, that's like a small little touch, you know.

00:33:48 Speaker 1

OK, and as a stylist, how do you view the fusion of streetwear brands and luxury fashion in relation to UK rap?

00:33:58 Speaker 2

The fusion of streetwear brands and luxury fashion in the UK is a statement to the generous.

00:34:05 Speaker 2

Versatility. So like, I think it really shows how versatile the artists can be, you know, and it blurs the traditional boundaries, you know, allowing for like more unique and authentic expression of the artist, you know? And I feel like.

00:34:22 Speaker 2

It just resonates with a more diverse like rap music scene. You know, I think it shows that it's not.

00:34:29 Speaker 2

Just you know what everyone thinks it is, you know.

00:34:32 Speaker 1

Yes, and building from that, do you find differences between UK and US rap styles in terms of dressing?

00:34:39 Speaker 2

Yeah, definitely.

00:34:44 Speaker 2

I mean

00:34:48 Speaker 2

I definitely think like you can tell.

00:34:52 Speaker 2*

I mean, let me see how to word this, but like I think it's more about like you can see the culture and like the mentality behind.

00:35:04 Speaker 2*

The two like two sides of the rap scene because it's like you can see and you can see it through clothing. For example. You can see them maybe the UK mentality is more low key and you can see that maybe it's more.

00:35:24 Speaker 2*

Humble in a way, and it's more dark and it's more.

00:35:29 Speaker 2*

You know, and you can see that because they might just wear a track suit.

00:35:36 Speaker 2*

It's more clean, they wear a tracksuit, a specific shoe, and they wear a specific hat and that is the look that they're always going to wear. You know, I think it's less about being flashy, you know, and that tells a lot about the mentality in Europe as well, because Europeans are a bit more, you know.

00:35:56 Speaker 2*

They prefer to be low key, they're more clean and maybe there have been more traditional.

00:36:00 Speaker 2*

You know, you know, but in the US, they're more flashy. They're more, you know, colorful. They wanna wear brands. They actually use more luxury brands to show that they're louder, you know?

00:36:12 Speaker 2*

And I think it shows the mentality of the actual people you.

00:36:16 Speaker 2*

So it's very interesting to see like all those things you know even like.

00:36:24 Speaker 2

With this style in Lagos as well, you know, it's like very colorful, very, like kind of joyful, you know, it's like playful. You know, I think it's like it really tells a lot of, like, you know, the people and how they think, you know.

00:36:44 Speaker 1

Thank you so much. And lastly, what is your aim or goal as a stylist when working with rap artists? Are you commercially driven or creatively driven or both? And how relevant do you view

00:36:58 Speaker 1

The stylist in now that connection of whether it's commercial or creative, what the opinion of the stylist in that?

00:37:10 Speaker 2*

So my goal is, is by this definitely is more creative driven.

00:37:16 Speaker 2

I definitely should focus a bit on being commercial, but I definitely aim to tell stories and like.

00:37:26 Speaker 2*

Through style and contributing to the cultural tapestry of the UK music scene, but also art scene, you know, and then in, I think in general, my goal is to be like a kind of like.

00:37:45 Speaker 2*

Helper to like make someone's dreams like come true, you know? And like just like.

00:37:52 Speaker 2*

Visually translate what they want to do in a way where they can actually make something happen, you know and like, make the their dreams and aspirations come true. So like, I think that for me is like what holds the most like personal.

00:38:09 Speaker 2*

Significance. And it's not just about creating stylish looks, but like someone's actual individuality. And like you know.

00:38:21 Speaker 2*

Yeah, like dream. You know, how do you say, like, when someone wants to make a dream come true, like manifestation.

00:38:30 Speaker 2

Yeah, like just like help them make their dreams come true. That that, that is my main thing. Because it's like for me, it's difficult to make my own. But when I see someone so passionate

00:38:41 Speaker 2*

Doing what they're doing, I want to help to, like, make that a reality, you know? Make the artists vision come true

00:38:51 Speaker 2*

That is my main goal.

00:38:55 Speaker 1

Wow, thank you so much for

00:38:56 Speaker 1

taking part

00:38:57 Speaker 1

in this interview, thank you so so much.

00:38:58 Speaker 2

You're welcome.

Appendix 3.1: Transcript of Interview with Ibrahim Kamara

Ibrahim Kamara GUAP Interview Transcription

Speaker 1: Researcher (Tiri Murai)

Speaker 2: Participant (Ibrahim Kamara)

Place of Interview: South East London

Duration of interview: 15:09

Date of interview: 22/05/2023

00:00:00 Speaker 1

So I'm going to start the recording now.

00:00:03 Speaker 1

So first I'd want to ask you whether you see an interconnection with UK rap in specific and luxury brands.

00:00:12 Speaker 2

Yeah, definitely. I feel like there's.

00:00:15 Speaker 2

Definitely over like the last couple years there's been. I've seen like a lot more rappers trying to get into

00:00:21 Speaker 2

The luxury space.

00:00:25 Speaker 2

Also seeing that.

00:00:28 Speaker 2

The way

00:00:30 Speaker 2

Rappers dress as kind of.

00:00:33 Speaker 2

Yeah, gentrified; that kind of; a lot of that High Street luxury brands.

00:00:43 Speaker 2

Are now like trying to get into that streetwear and like have the same aesthetic as like what rappers would wear in music.

00:00:52 Speaker 1

OK, and do you

00:00:54 Speaker 1

See like the use of luxury brand names in like lyrics -

00:01:02 Speaker 1

What is your perspective on that? Do you see it as like product placement or is it just rappers just speaking about like brands that they like or what is your take on that

00:01:12 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think aspiration, I think.

00:01:16 Speaker 2

A lot of people wanna get richer and I think the lifestyle of richer, aligns to a lot of the luxury brands. So I think a.

00:01:24 Speaker 2

Lot of.

00:01:27 Speaker 2

A lot of artists will use luxury.

00:01:30 Speaker 2

Brands in their.

00:01:31 Speaker 2

Lyrics as an aspirational tool, but then also.

00:01:36 Speaker 2

A way of showing that wealth or showing “I’m rich right now”. So yeah, they just name drop these brands and give them that free promotion

00:01:44 Speaker 1

And do you think that that influences consumers or their fans? So like do you feel like someone would hear like, headie one talk about

00:01:57 Speaker 1

Like Chanel

00:01:58 Speaker 2

100 percent. Yeah, you see it with people like, let's say, Central Cee

00:02:01 Speaker 2

Wearing the Nike tech pack.

00:02:04 Speaker 2

Then people want to wear tech packs, I think. I think music has always.

00:02:12 Speaker 2

Influenced buying decisions. So I think there's a lot of brands where the product they made the intent of the product was for sports or for something else and through music.

00:02:28 Speaker 2

It's now become lifestyle.

00:02:31 Speaker 2

Music helps turn products into a lifestyle.

00:02:37 Speaker 2

Rather than just the product.

00:02:40 Speaker 1

Interesting. And I mean, you're an owner of a magazine, a platform, do you

00:02:47 Speaker 1

Use that interconnection

00:02:50 Speaker 1

Like in your work or you know in editorials or anything that you're doing?

00:02:54 Speaker 2

Yeah, definitely a lot of.

00:02:57 Speaker 2

artists don't really get the chance to go and present themselves

00:03:04 Speaker 2

In a

00:03:06 Speaker 2

High fashion slash luxury way.

00:03:09 Speaker 2

So one of our jobs is when

00:03:11 Speaker 2

We are working with that

00:03:12 Speaker 2

Artist, is to bring that out of them.

00:03:14 Speaker 2

So alot of people might, it might be.

00:03:17 Speaker 2

Out of their comfort zone, because they don't usually dress high fashion like that, I think. Yeah. Part of our job is to, like, create a world around them and actually bring that to life.

00:03:28 Speaker 2

So yeah, definitely merge the two.

00:03:30 Speaker 1

Interesting. OK. And in terms of consumerism like is it is your target audience?

00:03:37 Speaker 1

Gen. Z and millennials? And like do they align with now who's listening to this music and stuff?

00:03:43 Speaker 2

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, just young people, I think someone said this to me to the other day. There's always gonna be a generation of young people. Like, that's whatever we call them changes innit,

00:03:54 Speaker 2

You know, but

00:03:55 Speaker 2

There's always going to be a group of young people

00:03:57 Speaker 2

And you know our thing is always going to be like.

00:04:00 Speaker 2

Targeting that group of people and that group of people will always listen

00:04:04 Speaker 2

To a range of music.

00:04:07 Speaker 1

Yeah, OK. And with the Guap gala, it's I saw a tweet the other day saying that it's, you know, basically like the Met Gala in the UK

00:04:20 Speaker 1

it's a space where people probably who would not be like invited to the Met Gala like the actual one get to express themselves in that same way.

00:04:31 Speaker 1

Is where does you know UK rap? Like, lie in that like and also like brands, even if it's not luxury like what's the goal or aim of having that group gala?

00:04:48 Speaker 2

I wouldn't say rappers actually

00:04:51 Speaker 2

Have anything to do with it to be honest

00:04:59 Speaker 2

I think we wanted something in the UK that had, like, the creativity of the Met Gala, but then also had like the it's an actual award show innit. So have like the legacy of like the Brits, so mergeing like the two together.

00:05:04 Speaker 1

OK.

00:05:15 Speaker 2

And create something, yeah.

00:05:18 Speaker 2

That hasn't been done cause I think we've been to a lot of like.

00:05:21 Speaker 2

We've been to a lot of events and a.

00:05:23 Speaker 2

Lot of award shows.

00:05:25 Speaker 2

And we wanted to make something that people would experience, not just attempt so.

00:05:30 Speaker 2

Within the gala.

00:05:32 Speaker 2

It's an actual experience, like there's loads of things that are happening within that room, so I think.

00:05:37 Speaker 2

Yeah, those are the main things. And like the main vision, it's just like.

00:05:40 Speaker 2

To actually bring that experience, that's like.

00:05:43 Speaker 2

Very different to what the UK has had before.

00:05:45 Speaker 1

Amazing. That's that's really cool. Like, OK, wait, I just want to see the other questions because I'm going, but.

00:05:58 Speaker 1

OK. And how relevant is UK rap to your magazine?

00:06:05 Speaker 1

Like how is it like a big part of when you're kind of doing an issue or?

00:06:33 Speaker 1

How relevant are rappers to your publication and to your platform, and also the stylist cause? I'm also investigating like the role of the stylist

00:06:56 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think rappers, I think, for us, the rappers, we tend to.

00:07:01 Speaker 2

Cover are rappers that people would say are kind of left field.

00:07:05 Speaker 1

OK.

00:07:06 Speaker 2

So a lot of the people we put.

00:07:07 Speaker 2

On aren't like the.

00:07:09 Speaker 2

People that you see in the mainstream, they're like the alternative.

00:07:13 Speaker 2

Type of act.

00:07:15 Speaker 1

OK.

00:07:15 Speaker 2

So yeah, definitely like a part of our.

00:07:23 Speaker 2

Yeah, I it's just, it's, yeah, it's just stuff that we.

00:07:29 Speaker 2

Yeah, that artists that we think are gonna do well, but like most of the time, mainstream doesn't like.

00:07:35 Speaker 2

see it and then in terms of the stylist - stylists are the ones that.

00:07:39 Speaker 2

Kind of like build.

00:07:42 Speaker 2

Not personas, but like an identity or can help like push an identity for an artist. Yeah. So I think they're very important because sometimes the artist doesn't know what identity they want. And the stylist is the one that's gonna be able to like pull

00:07:56 Speaker 2

Together things to actually like push forward that identity, yeah.

00:08:00 Speaker 1

Interesting. Wow, that's a really cool perspective.

00:08:19 Speaker 1

And in your opinion, how

00:08:24 Speaker 1

how strong are the contributions of the African diaspora, and that includes the Caribbean

00:08:35 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think, Kind of like pushing the whole culture forward, I think, especially in Britain like.

00:08:41 Speaker 2

A lot of us are first generation of.

00:08:47 Speaker 2

People like.

00:08:48 Speaker 2

Africans that that were born here and that were raised here.

00:08:49 Speaker 1

Yeah, yeah.

00:08:51 Speaker 2

And I think.

00:08:53 Speaker 2

A lot of our parents came over here like 30-20 years ago.

00:08:57 Speaker 2

And so we're only now seeing like the effects of that migration and I think a lot of like the.

00:09:04 Speaker 2

A lot of the movers and shakers of like culture are like young black Africans and stuff, so.

00:09:12 Speaker 2

Yeah, it's it's deffo

00:09:14 Speaker 2

Happening, but I think it's taken that long because obviously we're only adults.

00:09:18 Speaker 2

Now so like.

00:09:19 Speaker 2

Yeah, we are the adults now and then, like, yeah, our parents just came over here. So we're really in the early stages of, like, the foundations of what it.

00:09:27 Speaker 2

Means to be like black.

00:09:28 Speaker 2

British here, and we are literally like the first generation.

00:09:32 Speaker 1

Yeah, interesting. Interesting.

00:09:39 Speaker 1

Let me just.

00:09:42 Speaker 1

And in your opinion, what are the cultural and societal impacts on identities that UK rap and its relationship with luxury fashion like bring into place? So like, do you feel that now like that interconnection formulates identities?

00:10:10 Speaker 2

Ask the question again?

00:10:12 Speaker 1

So in your opinion, what are the cultural and societal impacts on identities that UK rap and its relationship with fashion brands in the luxury sector contribute?

00:10:27 Speaker 2

Oh, I think a lot of kids wanna dress like rappers, but I don't think that's just

00:10:30 Speaker 2

A UK thing

00:10:31 Speaker 2

I think that's it's. Yeah, it's everywhere. It's always.

00:10:33 Speaker 2

Been like that. So I just think.

00:10:36 Speaker 2

Wherever rappers like the stuff rappers wear or like the identity rappers wear

00:10:42 Speaker 2

A lot of young

00:10:42 Speaker 2

People want to emulate so.

00:10:46 Speaker 2

I think it's the same with the UK, like a lot of kids trying to dress like the rappers, cause the rappers are what success looks like to a lot of young people, so that's what they.

00:10:59 Speaker 2

Aspire to.

00:11:01 Speaker 1

Interesting. OK.

00:11:12 Speaker 1

So I saw that Guap magazine is the first video magazine. What does that mean?

00:11:19 Speaker 2

OK. So when we first started, we had a physical magazine that we used to use a technology called augmented reality like scanned over the magazine and then video interviews would play too.

00:11:30 Speaker 2

So it's like.

00:11:31 Speaker 2

Snapchat filters, but you like scan over the magazine and then yeah, the interviews.

00:11:40 Speaker 2

Would play to you rather than

00:11:42 Speaker 2

Reading it. So Yeah.

00:11:46 Speaker 2

So that's how we actually started.

00:11:49 Speaker 2

We used to shoot interviews.

00:12:07 Speaker 1

Wow, that's really cool.

00:12:17 Speaker 1

OK. So the last question is what are your views of the relationship and synergy between UK rap and luxury fashion?

00:12:27 Speaker 2

What are the synergies?

00:12:28 Speaker 1

Yeah, like, what do you see that connects the two?

00:12:33 Speaker 2

Probably the.

00:12:40 Speaker 2

The aspiration part so like.

00:12:43 Speaker 1

OK.

00:12:45 Speaker 2

Both sell a higher.

00:12:47 Speaker 2

Living, I think.

00:12:50 Speaker 2

I would say.

00:12:53 Speaker 2

What else would I say?

00:13:01 Speaker 2

I think that's the main thing

00:13:02 Speaker 2

I think the aspiration, but also the perception of both of them, the perception of both is of bigger, so I think.

00:13:14 Speaker 2

It's like.

00:13:16 Speaker 2

In terms, in terms of rap specifically

00:13:20 Speaker 2

They both give that feeling of like I want that kind of thing.

00:13:24 Speaker 1

OK. And do you think that it's like to do with

00:13:29 Speaker 1

Do you think that the way that rappers connect to listeners and then like make them want to like dress like them and stuff; is that realness? Or do you feel like there's a marketing agenda behind it?

00:13:51 Speaker 2

I think it's kind of what they've been fed; I feel like a lot of people - to be honest, I just think when you come from nothing, or like you start rap, a lot of people rap their stories and that. And I think they're probably coming from like

00:14:05 Speaker 2

A place of

00:14:11 Speaker 2

Poverty

00:14:13 Speaker 2

A lot of rappers coming from a place of poverty

00:14:18 Speaker 2

Yeah, luxury like a luxurious life is just something they want. Yeah. So I think part of it, part of it is real, but I think it's just like the.

00:14:29 Speaker 2

Byproduct of.

00:14:31 Speaker 2

OK, when I get to this place, I'm gonna be able to afford this, and I might not even like it. But because I can afford it. Yeah, because I can innit. So I think it's kind of like an indicator of success to a rapper to be able to do that. So, I think that part is somewhat fed to us

00:14:55 Speaker 1

OK.

00:14:56 Speaker 2

But somewhat.

00:14:58 Speaker 2

Ingrained in us as well, yeah.

00:15:00

OK.

00:15:01 Speaker 1

Interesting. Thank you so much. You've given me amazing insights.

Appendix 4: Final sample of songs

Rap Artist	Song Name	Date
1. Skepta feat. JME	That's Not Me	2014
2. Fekky and Dizzee Rascal	Still Sittin' Here	2014
3. Ghetts	Escos Spirit	2014
4. Afrikan Boy	Hit 'Em Up	2014
5. Jme feat. Giggs	Man Don't Care	2015
6. Chip feat. Wiley and Frisco	My Bruddaz	2015
7. Lancey Foux	Gunsxroses	2015
8. J Hus	I'm Coming	2015
9. Skepta	Shut Down	2015
10. Kano feat. Giggs and Wiley	3 Wheel-Ups	2016
11. Stefflon Don	Real Ting	2016
12. Skepta feat. Wiley and Chip	Corn on the Curb	2016
13. Skepta	Man	2016
14. J Hus	Bouff Daddy	2017
15. Giggs	The Essence	2017
16. Fredo	Like That	2017
17. Stormzy	Big For Your Boots	2017
18. J Hus	Spirit	2017
19. Skepta	Still	2017
20. Giggs feat. Dave	Peligro	2017
21. Fredo feat. Blade Brown	Pulling Up	2017
22. Kenny All Star feat. Lancey Foux, Hardy Caprio and Yung Fume	I Won't Fail	2018
23. Lancey Foux	Sassy/Red Red Wine	2018
24. Unknown T	Homerton B	2018
25. D-Block Europe and Yxng Bane	Better Than Yours	2018
26. Kenny All Star feat. Headie One	Tracksuit Love	2018
27. Dave and Fredo	Funky Friday	2018
28. D-Block Europe and Yxng Bane	Gucci Mane	2018
29. Stefflon Don	Jellio	2018
30. D-Block Europe and Yxng Bane	Cocktail	2018
31. Jme	Issmad	2019
32. D-Block Europe	Home Pussy	2019
33. Dave	Purple Heart	2019
34. Ms Banks	Hood Bitch	2019

35. Blade Brown feat. Knucks	Harrods	2019
36. Nines	Pride	2019
37. Steel Banglez feat. AJ Tracy and Mostack	Fashion Week	2019
38. Skepta feat. Lancey Foux	Animal Instinct	2019
39. Giggs	SET IT OFF	2019
40. NSG	OT Bop	2019
41. Lancey Foux feat. Skepta and Chip	PSYKENIGHT	2019
42. Headie One feat. Lotto Ash	Chanel	2019
43. D-Block Europe	Bando Boy	2019
44. Dave	Streatham	2019
45. Skepta	Glow In The Dark	2019
46. Jme	Pricks	2019
47. Ms Banks	Bad B Bop	2019
48. D-Block Europe feat. Dave	Playing for Keeps	2019
49. Stormzy feat. Headie One	Audacity	2019
50. Headie One feat. Young T and Bugsey	Princess Cuts	2020
51. Ghetts feat. Skepta	IC3	2020
52. J Hus	Deeper Than Rap	2020
53. Chip	Killer MC	2020
54. Unknown T feat. Young Adz	LV	2020
55. Headie One feat. Aitch	Parlez-Vous Anglais	2020
56. Skepta, Chip and Yound Adz	Golden Brown	2020
57. Ivorian Doll	Rumours	2020
58. D-Block Europe	Only Fans	2020
59. Shaybo	Dobale	2020
60. Headie One feat. Skepta	Try Me	2020
61. Skepta, Chip and Yound Adz	St Tropez	2020
62. Dave and Stormzy	Clash	2021
63. Lancey Foux	SWEET!	2021
64. Stefflon Don and Ms Banks	Dip	2021
65. Skepta feat. Teezee and Kid Cudi	Peace of Mind	2021
66. D-Block Europe	Patek Pain	2021
67. Fredo feat. Dave	Money Talks	2021
68. Digga D	Toxic	2021
69. Pa Salieu feat. Obongjayar	Style and Fashion	2021

70. Skepta	Bellator	2021
71. Lancey Foux	DON'T! - TRUST ME	2021
72. D-Block Europe feat. Offset	Chrome Hearts	2021
73. Dave	Verdansk	2021
74. Little Simz feat. Obongjayar	Point and Kill	2021
75. D-Block Europe feat. Central Cee	Overseas	2021
76. Stormzy	Mel Made Me Do It	2022
77. Stay Flee Get Lizzy, Lancey Foux, and SL	Simple	2022
78. K-Trap and Skepta	Warm (Remix)	2022
79. Clavish	Public Figure	2022
80. Headie One	50s	2022
81. Blade Brown and K-Trap	Xtra Time	2022
82. D-Block Europe	4 The Win	2022
83. DigDat	Bentayga	2022
84. Giggs	Da Maximum	2022
85. Lancey Foux	I FEEL LIKE I'M ME	2022
86. Unknown T	Often	2022
87. K-Trap	Spoilt	2022
88. Digga D and Still Brickin	Pump 101	2022
89. Lancey Foux	GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS	2023
90. Ms Banks feat. GRM Daily	Daily Duppy	2023
91. Unknown T and Lancey Foux	FREE SLIME/SEXY GIRLS	2023
92. D-Block Europe and Young Adz	Crying In Chanel	2023
93. J Hus feat. Villz	Comeback	2023
94. Fimiguerrero	Immigrant	2023
95. Lancey Foux feat. Sexyy Red	MMM HMM	2023
96. Giggs	Folklore	2023
97. D-Block Europe and Clavish	Pakistan	2023
98. Headie One, K-Trap and Clavish	TRIPLE THREAT	2023
99. Len	Addiction	2023
100. Fimiguerrero	Marni	2023
101. 1017 ALYX 9SM feat. Lancey Foux	Cursed	2023
102. D-Block Europe	I Need It Now	2023
103. Len feat. Unknown T	NIKO BELLIC	2023
104. Unknown T	Bon Appétit	2023

105. D-Block Europe	Hush Lil Baby	2023
106. Len feat. Lancey Foux	IJUST	2023
107. Dave and Central Cee	Our 25th Birthday	2023
108. D-Block Europe	Lottery Love	2023
109. Skepta	Gas Me Up	2024
110. Headie One	Socials	2024
111. Stefflon Don feat. D-Block Europe	Madam Moiselle	2024
112. Shaybo	Money	2024
113. Clavish and D-Block Europe	Most Definitely	2024
114. AJ Tracy	Bubble Bath	2024
115. D-Block Europe	Lady In Hermes	2024
116. D-Block Europe and Noizy	Eagle	2024
117. D-Block Europe	Still Outside	2024
118. Len	CHAKRa	2024
119. Fimiguerrero and Len	Behave	2024
120. Bashy	How Black Men Lose Their Smile	2024
121. K-Trap and Blade Brown	Mobsters	2024
122. Skrapz, Nines and D-Block Europe	Cuban Links	2024
123. Knucks feat. Fimiguerrero	Nkita	2024
124. Shaybo	Get It	2024
125. Fimiguerrero	Gucci	2024
126. D-Block Europe	KiKi (What Would Drizzy Say?)	2024