MAH FACE DON’ MATCH MAH MOUF’: A WHITE GIRL TALKING BLACK

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by
Kathryn Scheuring

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

MAH FACE DON’ MATCH MAH MOUF’: A WHITE GIRL TALKING BLACK

by

Kathryn Scheuring

The use of African American English (AAE) is an integral component of African American history and culture. The phonemes and linguistic characteristics of AAE are a symbol of Black identity and are unique to several distinct groups of Africans (Rickford & Rickford, 2000). AAE consists of a linguistic structure with its own phonological, morphological, and syntactical components that establish it as a dialect of Standard English. In communities like Rancho Cordova, California, the use of AAE is common due to a predominately African American population. The dominant culture’s language influences other racial groups, including Whites to adopt that language and culture. The adoption of African American culture and language by other racial groups, specifically Whites, has a negative impact on the traditions and history of the Black culture. The link to the history and heritage is often not understood by Whites and sparks anger among many African Americans. Many Whites who grow up in urban communities adopt the language and culture of the African American community but struggle to gain social acceptance by both White and African American communities (Cutler, 1999). Whites who have grown up in predominately urban neighborhoods and adopt different racial and cultural customs are considered culturally inferior (Morris, 2006). This study utilized the
ethnographic approach to analyze the linguistic abilities and perceptions of a White African American English speaker. Two structured interviews of approximately 55 minutes in length each were conducted to answer the following research questions: (a) What are the common phonological and morphological features used by White speakers of African American English? and (b) What are the perceptions of Whites on racial stereotypes and adoption of African American English and culture and their impact on race, culture, and language? Limited research is available (Bucholtz, 2011; Morris, 2006) documenting the perceptions of Blacks who live amongst other Whites who have adopted their language and culture. This study acknowledges that the faces of AAE speakers in urban communities are changing and the need to assimilate and survive in poor urban communities will prompt alternate racial groups to authentically adopt African American English and culture (Kitwana, 2005).

________________________, Committee Chair
José Cintrón, Ph.D.

________________________
Date
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents for always supporting me in all of my scholastic endeavors. My educational opportunities have taken me down several different paths and you have unconditionally supported each one. Your unselfish contributions have laid the foundation for the diligence and discipline necessary to complete this thesis. This one is for you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the participation and assistance of many people. A special thanks goes to the participant of the study for allowing the readers to gain an insight into her world. Thank you for discussing your perceptions so freely. I sincerely thank Dr. Cintrón and the entire faculty in the Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department for all their support and guidance. Their contributions are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

African American English (AAE) has several different interchangeable names such as Black English, African American Vernacular English, Spoken Soul, and Black Vernacular English that are used to classify this dialect of English (Rickford & Rickford, 2000). It has been defined as “an ethnoracially specific nonstandard linguistic variety spoken by many African Americans at least some of the time” (Bucholtz, 2011, p. 117). “It marks Black identity; and is a symbol of a culture and a life-style that have had and continue to have a profound impact on American popular life” (Rickford & Rickford, 2000, p. 10). AAE has a distinct linguistic structure that contains its own phonological, morphological, and syntactical components. The phonemes and linguistic characteristics of AAE are unique to several distinct groups of Africans and have been passed along over many generations (Rickford & Rickford, 2000).

The use of AAE is prominent in the urban city of Rancho Cordova, California where this study took place and has been referred to as a Black dialect of Mainstream Standard English (Roseberry-Mckibbin, 2008). The nonstandard dialect of English is prominent in many social and geographical settings that are heavily populated with African Americans. “African Americans from low-socioeconomic status backgrounds are more likely to use a higher percentage of AAE features” (Roseberry-Mckibbin, 2008, p. 68). Common phonological and morphological features of AAE are based on the
speech production of African Americans and most research does not include common features produced by White AAE speakers. Whites may speak AAE English if their primary peer groups are composed of African Americans who speak AAE and may adopt African American culture and speech as survival strategies in gang areas (Cutler, 1999). AAE allows speakers to express themselves and connect with a rich cultural history. “AAE-influenced language was a form of racialized cultural property indexical of black-or at least nonwhite-identity” (Bucholtz, 2011, p. 118). Non-black speakers of AAE, specifically Whites, are not automatically accepted within urban communities and must demonstrate authenticity to gain social acceptance (Cutler, 1999).

**Statement of the Problem**

Many Whites who grow up in urban communities adopt the language and culture of the African American community but struggle to gain social acceptance by both White and African American communities (Bucholtz, 2011). Urban Whites who adopt AAE and African American culture because of environmental circumstances are often chastised by other Whites and outcasted by African Americans for being inauthentic (Morris, 2006). Whites who defy racial stereotypes are scrutinized because their mannerisms do not align with their corresponding skin color, and those who have grown up in predominately urban neighborhoods and adopt differing racial and cultural customs are considered culturally inferior (Morris, 2006). When Whites adopt AAE and Black culture to obtain social acceptance, it can lead to negative self-images, academic deficiencies and expulsions, dropout rates, high rates of substance abuse, and crime
(Morris, 2006). The adoption of African American culture and AAE by other racial groups, specifically Whites, has a negative impact on the traditions and history of the Black culture. The link to the history and heritage is not understood by others and sparks anger among many African Americans.

**Purpose of the Study**

The predominately Black and Latino populations bring a diverse culture and language to the city that is not considered stereotypically appropriate for Whites to adopt (Cutler, 1999). In school settings with predominately African American students, White students tend to adopt AAE and African American style and culture (Bucholtz, 2011). By studying the perceptions of urban Whites, researchers can gain insight into the impact adopting a different racial group’s language and culture can have. Analyzing the social consequences between racial groups will help aide the understanding of what it means to be authentic within a racial group and will encourage society to deviate from racial stereotyping.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical frameworks that serve as the foundation for this investigation are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Sociolinguistic Theory (linguicism). CRT is used to “analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisomds that make up the common culture about race” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). Stereotypically with regard to language, AAE is generally associated with the African American community and evokes several issues when spoken by other racial groups, especially Whites.
history, the racial dynamics established between Whites and African Americans are clearly defined and “White involvement in Black culture is immediately problematic” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 342). This study examined spoken AAE along with the perceptions of interracial relations and stereotypes in an urban community. Executing the research study through a sociolinguistic lens also gives the reader an introduction to the roles linguicism and linguistic subordination play in shaping society’s attitudes of Whites who defy the racial norms associated with language and culture. The prejudices associated with linguicism affect AAE speaking-Whites and consequently produce a lack of societal acceptance in both the White and Black communities (Kitwana, 2005). As stated in Leeman, Rabin, and Román-Mendoza (2011), “linguicism and linguistic subordination may lead to lowered self-esteem and disempowerment and reduces the likelihood of attaining educational and societal success” (p. 482).

**Research Questions**

Considerable research has focused on documenting the experiences of White students who have grown up in urban communities and attended urban schools. Adopting certain racial styles or social groups contributes to societal acceptance, but minimal research has surfaced pertaining to the way society views the adoption of another language, more specifically, a language that is not commonly used within one racial group but very common in another. The emphasis of this study was on investigating the specific phonological and morphological features of a White woman who speaks AAE and her personal experiences pertaining to race and cultural acceptance.
A White person’s use of AAE is a controversial topic and is the central theme of this study. The purpose of this research was to examine the participant’s linguistic ability in spoken AAE and her life experiences growing up and living as a minority in an urban community. The aim of the present study was to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the common phonological and morphological features used by White speakers of African American English?
2. What are the perceptions of Whites on racial stereotypes and adoption of African American English and culture and the impact on race, culture, and language?

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that include the following: small sample size, education level, and demographics of the participant population. Only one White participant was interviewed, making the results hard to generalize to all Whites who grow up in urban communities and adopt the African American language and culture. The common phonological and morphological features along with the participant’s perceptions may vary amongst people with higher or lower education levels or for people from different demographics.

Delimitations

Some of the delimitations found in this study include the qualitative study design that focuses on the perceptions of the population without generalizable numerical data.
The nature of the research question demands a specific population of people, therefore excluding other groups that do not meet the race and language inclusion criteria. Also, the time frame for the observation and data collection of the study was significantly shorter than that of a traditional ethnography. An ethnographic study is usually conducted for a year or more to provide a deeper understanding of the influences that race, culture, and language have on the participant. The observations and data collection for this study only lasted approximately six months.

**Definition of Terms**

**African American English**

“An ethnoracially specific nonstandard linguistic variety spoken by many African Americans at least some of the time” (Bucholtz, 2011, p. 117).

**Authenticity**

“The quality of being authentic; genuineness” (Urdang, 1975, p. 91).

**Linguicism**

Prejudice based on a person’s language or manner of speaking

**Minority**

“A group differing in race, religion, or ethnic background from the majority of a population” (Urdang, 1975, p. 851)

**Morphology**

“The study of the structure or forms of words, primarily through the use of the construction of morphemes” (Craig, 2003, p. 630)
Phonology

“The study of specific sound patterns of a language” (Craig, 2003, p. 630)

Urban

“Characterized by pertaining to or living in a city or cities” (Urdang, 1975, p. 1446)

White Trash

A “group of Whites that does not adhere to the typical rules and behaviors associated with Whiteness” (Dempsey, 2007, p. 304)

Organization of the Remainder of the Thesis

The literature review in Chapter 2 begins with an introduction to the history of AAE and culture. A brief restatement of the problem is provided and continues into the discussion of urban Whites who speak AAE and adopt African American culture. The topics of linguicism, racial tension, authenticity, White privilege, and White trash are addressed in the literature review. Chapter 3 includes the methodology that was used to examine the research questions. The methodology section includes the research design, information about the selected participant, procedures used, data collection methods, and information about the interview setting. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the transcribed informal interviews and the qualitative interviews. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of the findings, conclusions that were drawn from the data, and recommendations for future research. This chapter also includes any unforeseen limitations of the study and proper implications.
Background of the Researcher

The researcher was born in Rancho Cordova, California and has lived in Sacramento County for most of her life. She graduated from California State University, Sacramento in 2010, earning a Bachelors of Science degree in Speech Pathology with a minor in American Sign Language and Spanish. She became a licensed Speech Language Pathology Assistant in December 2010 and has a great deal of experience analyzing and transcribing different dialects of speech. Her areas of employment have included several Title I schools, private speech clinics, and university hospitals.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture refers to “the sociological and psychological characteristics of groups as well as the arts, beliefs, institutions, and other products of each group” (Horwitz, 2008, p. 298). It aligns a group of individuals together based on language, religion, and strong cultural background. Language is an essential part of culture, and to be a part of a culture is to know the language. “Language is vital to identity, no matter the culture” (Zhernokleyev, 2013, p. 48). AAE is historically regarded as a nonstandard dialect of English that is essential to Black cultural identity (Baugh, 1983). Linguistic behavior is a vivid indicator of Black survival and thrives upon stylistic variations from standard mainstream English. John Baugh (1983, 2000) has conducted several ethnographic studies pertaining to AAE; however, all the research was focused on African American speakers. Minimal research (Cutler, 1999) has been conducted on African American English spoken by Whites and evokes heavy criticism from both White and Black communities. AAE speakers become particularly sensitive when Whites try to adopt Black speech patterns because it is patronizing and Whites are perceived to be talking down to the Blacks (Baugh, 1983). African American English versus Standard Mainstream English, racial tensions between Black and White AAE speakers, authenticity, White privilege, and White trash are examined in the following literature review.
African American English vs. Standard Mainstream English

Traditionally, the use of AAE is deeply rooted in Black culture and is reminiscent of the values and traditions of a rich culture heritage. The struggles and oppression of the African American community throughout history have contributed to the formulation of AAE. Baugh’s ethnographic study (1983) discussed the birth of “black street speech” and its human evolution over the years. Modern times dictate the social and political importance of the language and dialect of Black Americans as a group (Baugh, 1983). The long-standing written traditions of Standard English are built upon the precise delivery and grammatical structure, solidifying any other form of speech as less than correct (Baugh, 1983). The predominant view of the White society is that the larger mainstream society demands a “more educated manner of speaking” (Baugh, 1983, p. 23). The use of AAE is commonly referred to as street speech and its use is often deemed unacceptable in several academic and professional environments (Baugh, 2000). The nonstandard dialect of English that is deeply rooted in Black history and culture is consistently stigmatized outside of the home community. Many communities in the US view AAE as a dialect of English that can only be used by Black speakers regardless of cultural or demographic influences.

Racial Tension

In the comprehensive ethnographic study of Whites who live in urban communities and attend urban schools, Morris (2006) documented the racial tension between White and Black students. At Matthews Middle School in a low-income area of
San Antonio, Texas, poor White students struggled to fit in socially as the minority race. White teachers considered poor White students to be “inferior white trash that threaten to corrupt the supposed purity of” (Morris, 2006, p. 75). Numerous works (Amesen, 2002; Warren, 1999) declared that Whiteness is a social construction that has an invisible set of guidelines allotting power to the White race. This supposed power allows Whites to obtain specific privileges that are inaccessible to other racial groups. If a White person chooses to defer the privileges associated with Whiteness, then racial exclusion can occur. Cutler (1999) indicated that Whiteness has cash value and there is a right way and a wrong way to be White. The use of AAE as a White is deemed culturally unacceptable and Whites who speak it are often referred to as White trash.

In accord with Morris (2006), Bucholtz (2011) found similar racial tension between poor White and Black students in an urban high school in San Francisco, California. Her ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the mid-1990s examined how White teenagers in a multiracial high school adopted language to fit in socially. The Black and White students spoke AAE and demonstrated similar phonological and morphological features. White students also adopted Black culture, which included hip-hop and a specific style of dress. “Corn row style hairdos were found on the heads of White students” (Bucholtz, 2011, p. 117). Whites who used AAE evoked humor and astonishment from Black students specifically mocking the White students’ lack of authenticity.
**Authenticity**

The term authenticity pertains to a member’s authentic identification and directly correlates to one’s acceptance within a community (Culter, 1999). A White person’s use of AAE is stereotypically considered inappropriate and inauthentic in many Black urban communities. The verbal ability to speak AAE does not grant a White person authenticity within a Black community and several factors must be present for a person to be considered an authentic speaker. Authenticity, as it pertains to language, is “a claim that a person is natural and without artifice” and has a historical link between White and Black AAE speakers already considered authentic (Armstrong, 2004, p. 337). Eminem, a very controversial White rapper needed to prove his authenticity as a White speaker of AAE as he began his rap career. His historical link to the Black AAE speaking community is his producer Dr. Dre.

Dr. Dre was already a successful Black artist and a founder of gangsta rap; therefore, he provides the link bridging the White and Black communities (Armstrong, 2004). Eminem is considered “natural and without artifice” because he grew up in the city of Detroit in a low-income, predominately Black neighborhood. A White speaker’s history of living in an urban community amongst other Black speakers of AAE and his or her adaptation of the language and culture can provide the link between authentic and inauthentic (Armstrong, 2007). In Morris’s 2006 study, the acceptance of the community allowed the students to master the complex phonological and morphological features of AAE over several years. Despite racial tension, White participants in Bucholtz’s (2011)
study grew up speaking AAE as their primary language; however, not all of them were deemed authentic. The complex inter-dynamics of culture and language expose one’s ability to be deemed authentic and can vary from race to race and city to city (Amesen, 2002).

**White Privilege**

The term “whiteness” is commonly assigned to White people to place them on a social hierarchy that allows them “access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guarantee basic subsistence needs and therefore survival” (Amesen, 2002, p. 7). Bucholtz (2011) stated that the perceptions of Black students in her ethnographic research associate certain privileges with the White skin color that people of other races do not have. Members from other racial groups, including Hispanic and Asian, align members of the White race with “power, position, and perspective” (Amesen, 2002, p. 7). The “knapsack of special provisions, maps, and tools that White people have simply because they are White” is not applicable to poor urban Whites. Poor Whites living in urban neighborhoods do not have the “historical power, and social status of whiteness” (Warren, 1999, pp. 20, 193). Arnesen (2001) projected that not all White people “automatically exhibit the traits associated with whiteness” and that not “all Whites are considered equally White” (p. 9). Whites who have grown up in predominately urban neighborhoods and adopt differing racial and cultural customs are considered culturally inferior (Morris, 2006). The “low ranking members of the
whiteness club” are not held on the same hierarchy as middle-class suburban Whites and
have been deemed to be White trash (Warren, 1999, p. 203).

**White Trash**

A group of Whites that does not adhere to the typical rules and behaviors
associated with Whiteness are commonly referred to as White trash. White trash as a
construction allows for an outlet for explaining how race or ethnicity really can be the
basis for class conditions by creating a class of whites who do not belong to the
privileged class (Dempsey, 2007). The term White trash is used to define a White person
who lives in a manner that is socially unacceptable and aims to develop a hierarchy that
separates Whites from one another (Warren, 1999). Bucholtz (2011) stated that White
students can adopt certain styles of language such as AAE, Mexican slang, or valley girl
speech to fit in with the social hierarchy. If White students adopt certain styles of speech
because of their demographics, they are chastised by Whites and other racial groups for
not “acting white.” The divergence from the typical definition of “whiteness” has
exposed poor Whites to racial exclusion among other Whites (Bucholtz, 2011).

In Morris’s study (2006), interview responses from the White teachers in an urban
school district revealed that they believed poor Whites “lacked the resources and
ambition to live in a better neighborhood” (p. 65). “They come from low-income
families, to say it bluntly they’re what you call white trash” (Morris, 2006, p. 65).
Furthermore, in all the interviews with White teachers in the district, none of them ever
referred to any poor White students in the school district as intelligent or talented (Morris, 2006).
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this research was to analyze the phonological and morphological features of a White African American English (AAE) speaker and her perceptions of racial stereotypes, differing racial groups adopting AAE language and culture, and interracial relations. A moderate amount of research (Bucholtz, 2011; Cutler, 1999; Morris, 2006) has focused on documenting the perceptions of Whites who have grown up in urban communities and have adopted African American culture. Limited research is available (Bucholtz, 2011; Morris, 2006) that documents the perceptions of Blacks who live amongst other Whites who have adopted their language and culture. The intent of the study was to collect, analyze, and report perceptions and experiences of a White speaker of African American English. The significant findings derived from the research will increase the understanding of the role that race plays in the adoption of language and culture.

Study Design/ Data Collection

This qualitative investigation was executed as an ethnography to observe and analyze the specific phonological and morphological features of a White woman who speaks AAE. Her perceptions and lived experiences of racial stereotyping, different racial groups adapting AAE language and culture, and interracial relations were analyzed as well.
Structured interviews were administered to analyze the speaker’s linguistic abilities in AAE. Audio recording was necessary to accurately document specific speech productions and to aid the transcription process. A recording program on a laptop computer was utilized to maintain the integrity of the data and ensure confidentiality. The investigator was the only person to have immediate access to the gathered data during the study. The data were stored in a password-protected folder on the investigator’s computer for the duration of the research. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that the investigator was the only user of the computer and that the password was not shared with anyone.

A pseudonym is used in place of the participant’s real name and no identifying information about the participant is available to anyone. The intended topics that served as the foundation for the interview questions included the participant’s progression into the adoption of AAE language and culture, her authentic status, her experiences with the White and Black communities, and societal stigma and stereotypes associated with Whites who adopt African American language and culture. The transcriptions of the raw data are located in Appendix A.

**Research Questions**

Racial stereotypes define the way each individual should speak and behave to gain social acceptance. The questions used in this study’s interviews were designed to gather data on the perceptions of racial stereotypes, different racial groups adapting AAE language and culture, and interracial relations of a White AAE speaker. Several themes
common throughout research have social, academic, and political undertones that have influenced the way society perceives Whites who defy racial stereotypes. The use of AAE and adoption of African American culture as a White person can create conflicts between White and African American racial groups. Adopting certain racial styles or social groups contributes to societal acceptance, but no research has surfaced pertaining to the way society, specifically how African Americans, perceive Whites who adopt their language and culture. The following research questions were formulated for this study:

1. What are the common phonological and morphological features used by White and African American speakers of African American English?
2. What are the perceptions of Whites on racial stereotypes and adoption of African American English and culture and the impact on race, culture, and language?

Sample

* Indicates name has been changed

The convenience sampling method was used in the participant recruitment process. The participant lives in close proximity to a family member of the investigator. She was an ideal candidate to participate in the ethnography because she met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria to participate in this research study included identifying as White and speaking AAE as the primary language.
Participant

Melanie is a 26-year-old Polish immigrant who was brought to the United States by her mother when she was five years old. She has not maintained her linguistic abilities in the Polish language and has no recollection of her life during that time. She has never known her biological father and has been living in the city of Rancho Cordova, California since her arrival in the US. Her mother passed away when she was 12 years old and she has had a tumultuous relationship with her Ukrainian stepfather ever since then. At 19, she earned a high school diploma equivalency at Kinney High School and uses AAE as her primary language. She lives with her 6-year-old son in gang territory in Rancho Cordova and has several ties to well known gang members throughout the community. Her son’s father is currently serving three life sentences in a maximum-security prison for committing gang-related homicides.

Setting

Rancho Cordova, California is an urban city located 10 miles north of Sacramento, California. Low socioeconomic status of residents coupled with gang activity makes the city vulnerable to high crime. The city’s average crime rating for 2012 was 350.6 per 100,000 people, which is higher than the national average of 265.8 per 100,000 people. Violent crimes like murder, rape, and assault are common along with high occurrences of burglary and theft (City of Rancho Cordova, 2014). The racial makeup of Rancho Cordova, California is predominately Black and Latino with a small mix of Whites. The predominately Black and Latino populations bring a diverse culture
and language to the city that is not considered stereotypically appropriate for Whites to adopt (Cutler, 1999). The study was conducted in the home of the investigator’s grandmother at the cross street of Dawes and Folsom Boulevard in Rancho Cordova, California.

**Procedures**

A written consent form was administered to the participant and explained in depth the purpose of the research and the details of the study (see Appendix B). The participant was made aware that all data gathered would be kept confidential and personal names would be changed. The participant was aware that the interviews were recorded; however, the content of the interview was used only for the purpose of this research. Consent was given to use sample speech transcriptions as learning tools for others interested in researching White AAE speakers and the perceptions associated with adopting a different race’s language and culture. Two structured interviews were administered over a period of six months that recorded the participant’s linguistic abilities in AAE as well as the most common phonological and morphological features she utilized.

Each structured interview consisted of 15 predetermined questions administered to the participant to assess her perceptions, and non-predicted questions were added during the interview for clarification (see Appendix C). The study was conducted in a private home. The first interview in the series of two allowed the investigator to assess the participant’s linguistic ability in AAE. The phonological and morphological features
elicited from her speech established her linguistic ability in the language. The structured interview focused on using predetermined interview prompts to gain an understanding of the participant’s experiences associated with adopting a language and culture not associated with the White race.
Chapter 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Data Analysis

In this chapter, data are presented and analyzed to provide answers to the research questions previously presented.

1. What are the common phonological and morphological features used by White speakers of African American English?

2. What are the perceptions of Whites on racial stereotypes and adoption of African American English and culture and the impact on race, culture, and language?

Phonological and Morphological Review

The ethnographic approach to this study yielded many long excerpts that were recorded and transcribed (see Appendix C). The participant responded to all the structured interview questions in her primary language of AAE. Her speech was transcribed in AAE and then translated into Standard Mainstream English for comparison. Specific excerpts from her speech were chosen for comparison because of the linguistic similarities to common AAE linguistic features. Melanie’s language samples were collected and observed for fluency and accuracy in the initial, medial, and final positions.
Data from Table 1 and Table 2 summarize Melanie’s speech in comparison to the most commonly used phonological and morphological features of AAE. Transcriptions have been provided in African American English and Standard Mainstream English.

**Phonology**

Table 1 lists the seven most commonly used phonological features of African American English in Melanie’s speech. The first is the omission or lessened /r/ phoneme. In words like for and more the /r/ phoneme is omitted while lessened in words like color and mother. The omission and lessened phoneme occurs in the final position throughout her dialogue. The second feature is the substitution of the voiceless /th/ phoneme for the voiced /d/ phoneme in words like this, that, these, those, and what. Substitution occurs mainly in the initial position, but is also present in the final position. The substitution of the voiced /th/ phoneme for the /f/ or /t/ phoneme was very prevalent throughout Melanie’s interviews. In words like month and with, she substituted the /t/ (wit) and /f/ (monf) phonemes in the final position. Melanie varied her syllable stress patterns in words like po’lice and consistently reduced consonant clusters in the initial, medial, and final positions. Words like ‘round (around), ‘bout (about), ‘posed (supposed), and haf (have) are simplified to single consonants in specific sound sequences. The final two features are used the most frequently and occur in the final position of words. Melanie substituted the /n/ phoneme for the /ng/ in many words such as something, asking, going, and nothing. Something becomes /sumin/, asking turns into /askin/, etc. She also
substituted the final syllable of many words with a variety of other syllables. Words like to and my become /ta/ and /mah/ and the word an becomes /n/ (Craig, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African American English Feature/Characteristic English</th>
<th>African American English (Mainstream English)</th>
<th>Initial Position</th>
<th>Medial Position</th>
<th>Final Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omission or lessened /r/ phoneme</td>
<td>fo’ (for)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mo’ (more)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>colah (color)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>motha (mother)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dis (this)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dat (that)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless /th/ substitution for voiced /d/ phoneme</td>
<td>dese (these)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>those (dose)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>whad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Substitution of voiced /th/ phoneme for voiced /t/ or /f/ phoneme n/ng substitution</td>
<td>Wit (with)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monfs (months)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>goin’ (going)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>askin’ (asking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sumin (something)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nothin (nothing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing syllable stress patterns</td>
<td>po’llice (police)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonant cluster reduction</td>
<td>‘round (around)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘posed (supposed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘bout (about)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>haf (have)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final syllable substitution</td>
<td>ta (to)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mah (my)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (and) or (an)</td>
<td></td>
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Table 1: Melanie’s African American English Phonology Features
Morphology

Table 2 represents the five most common morphological features of AAE in Melanie’s speech. Melanie frequently omits the verb “have” in the present tense in many of her sentences. In phrases like “I have been living” and “I have been hustling” the auxiliary “have” is omitted and the statements become “I been living” and “I been hustling.” The second most common feature is the replacement of “is” and “are” in the future tense for “gonna.” “No one gonna say nothing” and “ain’t no one gonna give.” In the present tense, Melanie uses “is” regardless of the person. “They are hating and White bitches are scared” turns into “they is hatin’ and White bitches is scared.” She also frequently uses the word “done” combined with the past tense form of a verb to indicate an action has been completed. “I have been to school and they have been working” changes to “I done been to school” and “dey done been working.” The fifth most commonly used feature in Melanie’s speech is using the form “be” as the main verb. “We have been going” and “he is good” turns into “we be going” and “he be good” (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2008).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African American English Feature</th>
<th>Melanie’s AAE Sample</th>
<th>Mainstream English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present tense forms of auxiliary “have” are omitted</td>
<td>I been here mah whole life</td>
<td>I have been here my whole life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I been hustlin</td>
<td>I have been hustling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future tense “is” or “are” is replaced by gonna</td>
<td>No one gonna say nothing</td>
<td>No one is going to say anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ain’t nobody gonna give</td>
<td>No one is going to give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present tense “is” may be used regardless of person</td>
<td>They is hatin’</td>
<td>They are hating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White bitches is scared</td>
<td>White bitches are scared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Done” may be combined with a past tense form to indicate an action has been completed</td>
<td>I done been ta school</td>
<td>I have already been to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dey done been workin</td>
<td>They have been working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The form “be” is used as the main verb</td>
<td>We be goin’</td>
<td>We have been going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He be good</td>
<td>He is good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Melanie’s African American English Morphology Features

The comparison of Melanie’s speech to the common morphological and phonological features of AAE establishes her linguistic abilities in the language. Fluency in the language is an integral component of Melanie’s transformation and establishes her authenticity in the African American community. Melanie uses her primary language of AAE to recount her experiences of a White woman who has adopted the language and cultural traditions of the African American community. As discussed previously, she exhibits many of the same phonological and morphological features of AAE as an African American speaker. Her perceptions of racial stereotypes and adoption of AAE and culture along with its impact on race, culture, and language have been categorized in the following themes: the working poor, language as a means of acceptance, cultural transformation, and race pride ideations.
Melanie grew up in the urban city of Rancho Cordova, California in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The population of Rancho Cordova in the late 1990s was predominately African American with smaller percentages of Hispanics and Whites. Throughout her early childhood, she lived with her mother, stepfather, and younger half-sister Natalie. Throughout Melanie’s childhood, her family struggled to make mortgage payments and subsequently moved back and forth from multiple cities around Sacramento County.

They came here with me to Lincoln Village to Rancho then to Arden, then back to Rancho (dey came here wit me ta Lincoln Village and den to Rancho den to Arden den back ta Rancho). Always to the ‘hood areas yah know (always to dah ‘hood areas you know).

Melanie’s family was one of the only White families in the neighborhood at the time; therefore, most of her new friends were non-Whites. Melanie’s mother expected her to maintain adequate grades in school, take care of her sister Natalie, and abide by her stepfather’s rules. Melanie’s Polish mother and Ukrainian stepfather raised her to speak Standard Mainstream English and uphold traditional Catholic religious values. She was always aware of the diversity in Rancho Cordova but never understood the cultural differences between her family and those of her friends. Her Ukrainian stepfather forbid Melanie to have friends of different races and kept her sheltered from the diversity in the community around her.

My mom always made me feel free to be me, she was open to all types of people (mah mom alwayz made me feel free tah be me, yah she was open ta all types ah people)... My stepdad wasn’t though, he hates on everyone (mah stepdad ain’t
though, he hate on everyone). He used to interrogate all my boyfriends and say mean shit (he used ta interrogate all mah boyfriends and say mean shit). … My first boyfriend he didn’t let him in the house to see me, he was only allowed outside (mah first boyfriend he ain’t neva let him in dah house ta see me, he waz only allowed outside). He is kind of religious, but the culture is that way (he kinda religious, but da culture is dat way). You know the men have all the control over their wives or kids (ya know da dudes have all da control ova dey wives o kids).

Melanie and her mother had a very close relationship despite the tumultuous relationship she had with her stepfather. The daily struggles that coincided with living in poverty drove a deeper wedge between Melanie and stepfather. She never felt accepted by her stepfather and was always fighting for the same approval and love he showed for her half sister. His strict rules strengthened the bond between Melanie and her mother and pushed her to live up to her mother’s expectations. Melanie’s mother valued education and hard work and believed in the bright future that lay ahead for her daughters.

My mom was smart; she knew the area was ghetto that’s why she didn’t let me run around with just anyone (mah mom waz smart; she knew da area waz ghetto dat why she ain’t let me run ’round wit jus anyone). She never let me make my own choices so I didn’t know about gangs or different languages (she ain’t neva let me make mah own choices so I ain’t neva knew like ‘bout gangs or different languages)...I remember everyday I went to school and had to be home when those damn street lights went on (I memba errday I went tah schoo’ an I had tah be home when doez damn street lights waz on)...Because of that I knew some shit, I got that honor roll and that excellent award for doing shit in the community (because ah dat I knew some shit I got dat honor roll and dat excellent award fo’ doin’ shit in da community). I was you know that model White girl rolling down here in the ‘hood (I waz yah know dat model White girl rollin’ down here in da ‘hood).

When asked what it meant to be a model White girl Melanie responded “a White girl ‘posed ta be in her Abercrombie clothz and supa propa wit her speech and all dat
Throughout her grade school years Melanie remembers hearing her friends speak AAE, but she always regarded it as “slang.”

I had heard the slang way before I spoke it because all the kids were speaking it (*I done heard dah slang way befo I spoke it cuz all dah kids be speakin’ it*). I had never spoken the language though at home because my mom didn’t like it (*I ain’t neva spoke dah lingo dough at home cuz my mom ain’t like it*). She liked proper English and all that shit you know (*she like propa English and all dat shit ya know*)…The only reason I knew that White people talk differently is because my stepdad let me know (*Dah only reason I knew dat White people talk different is cuz mah step dad let me know*).

Melanie maintained the principal’s honor roll throughout elementary school and pursued several extracurricular activities. As she reflected on her childhood, she remembered a time when she was optimistic about her future and the things she might have achieved. Her strength and determination throughout her childhood were due in large part to her mother’s guidance and positive influences.

My life was different back in the day (*mah life waz different back in dah day*). Like my mom was everything to me (*like mah mom waz everything tah me*). She had so much love for me and wanted the best things in this world for me (*she had so much love fah me and wanted dah best things in dis world fah me*). I was happy, I had goals in this life; I felt like I could be something big and make money to give her nice things that she never had (*I waz happy, I had goalz in dis life, I felt like I could be somethin’ big an make money tah give her nice things dat she ain’t neva had*).

In 1999, Melanie’s mother was diagnosed with a rare form of brain cancer, which caused Melanie to spiral into depression. She stopped attending school on a regular basis and fought with her stepfather daily. Her mother was no longer able to provide emotional support for her and Melanie felt very alone. In 2001, Melanie’s mother’s passed away and Melanie became very hostile toward her stepfather and no longer followed the house
rules. The impact of her mother’s death prompted Melanie to stay out late at night, miss school for weeks at a time, and experiment with drugs and alcohol.

When my mom was here she didn’t let me outside all night to run the streets you know (when mah mom waz here she ain’t let me outside all night ta run da streets yah kno)… After she died, my stepdad didn’t give a fuck and I became my own boss at thirteen (afta she died my stepdad don’ give a fuck and I became mah own boss at thirteen). I hadn’t experienced much at that time so I hit the streets hard (I ain’t done experienced much at dat time so I hit da streets hard). Like I tried drinking and doing drugs and all of that was different than what I knew (like I tried drinkin’ and doin’ drugs an all dat waz different den what I knew). My friend down the street had the house to himself at nights because his mom had been working night shifts (my homie down dah street had dah house tah his self at nights cuz his moms done been workin’ night shifts). We were there every night drinking and smoking (we waz der erry night drinkin’ and smokin’).

Melanie’s stepfather remarried within a year of her mother’s death and his new wife became pregnant with twin girls. The lack of parental influence in Melanie’s life pushed her into a period of self-discovery. She began to realize the differences between her language and culture as a White girl and the language and culture of her African American peers. She became more defiant and started dating an African American man against her stepfather’s orders.

My dad is a racist so he never let me have friends over that were not White (mah dad a racist so he ain’t neva let me have friendz ova dat weren’t White)… I never was into White men because there aren’t too many around here, but if my stepdad wasn’t happy with a guy then I was about to pursue that guy more (I neva waz inta White dudes cuz ain’t too many ‘round here, but if my step dad wadn’t happy wit a dude den I’s ‘bout tah pursue dat dude mo’)… My stepdad was expecting me to date some square ass White guy even though their aren’t any White guys around here (mah step dad be ‘spectin’ me tah date some square ass White dude even do’ der ain’t no White dudes ‘round here)… Like he is a dumbass for thinking the place we have been living in for years isn’t ghetto as hell and that people living around here are White like me and Natty (like mah stepdad he a dumbass fah thinkin’ da place we done lived fo’ years ain’t ghetto az hell and dat people livin’ ‘round here is White like me an Natty).
Melanie’s new boyfriend Michael was heavily involved in a local gang and speaks AAE as his primary language. Melanie started to become more accustomed to the language her boyfriend and his friends were using and began to incorporate parts of the language into her vocabulary. Her language and clothing choices began to change and after five months of dating, Melanie’s stepfather discovered her new relationship. He was not happy with the choices she had been making and did not approve of her newly acquired language and culture.

My dad wasn’t going to let me talk that way or act that way (mah dad ain’t goin let me talk dat way or act dat way). He doesn’t know English really good, but he knows enough to get pissed if I wasn’t talking correctly (he ain’t know English real good, but he know enough ta get pissed if I ain’t talkin’ right). He let me know that no White girl should be talking and acting like me (He let me know dat no White girl should be talkin and actin like me). But what the fuck did he think would happen (but wat da fuck he think would happen)? When you are raised in the ‘hood you have to expect that to happen (When you raised in da ‘hood you gotta spect’ dat tah happen). He tried to make me learn the language like Ukrainian and hang around people from that country, but I wasn’t interested in that (he tried ta make me learn da language like Ukranian and hang ‘round people from dat country, but I ain’t interested in dat). He had a good friend that he wanted me to marry you know like an arranged marriage, but I wasn’t having that (he had a good friend dat he wanted me ta marry you know like ah arranged marriage, but I ain’t havin’ dat). He got really mad and he told me to get my shit and get the fuck up out his house and I was like cool (…He got hella pissed and he told me ta get mah shit and get dah fuck up out his house and I waz like cool). I have never been back. (I ain’t neva been back).

As Melanie was mourning the loss of her mother she began to understand the intertwined concepts of race, culture, and language. She questioned whether or not her behaviors and mannerisms fit into the parameters of the White race. With the memories
of her mother looming around her, Melanie made a revelation about her language and cultural identity.

Back in the day around that time when Big Willie style came out you know Will Smith (back in da day round dat time when Big Willie style came out ya know Will Smith), I was dealing with the pain of losing my mom and I would listen to that CD over and over again (I waz dealin wit da pain of losin’ mah mom and I would listen ta dat CD ova and ova again). Just the two of us (just dah two ah us)... When she died I lost that feeling of love and compassion, I had nothing (when she die I lost dat feelin’ of love and compassion, I had nothin’)... I noticed for the first time that the way I was acting and talking was not okay for someone of my color (I noticed fo dah first time dat da way I was actin and talkin waz not ok fah someone of mah colah)... I knew it was all over you know my life before was over. When she died my White side died too (I knew it waz all ova yah know mah life befo’ waz ova. When she die mah White side done died too.)

**Language as a Means of Acceptance**

As Melanie left her stepfather’s house and began a new life with Michael, the differences between his and her dialects of English became apparent. As noted previously, Standard Mainstream English has several phonological and morphological features that are vastly different from AAE. The foundational tenets of Melanie’s linguistic characteristics began to shift as her boyfriend introduced her to a new group of friends, which was affiliated with a gang and used AAE as their primary method of communication. Several of the gang members are a combination of Hispanic and African American descent. The influences of surrounding gangs in Sacramento County, including the Sureños, Norteños, Bloods, Crips, and the Mexican Mafia, had a large impact on the linguistic profile Melanie began to adopt. She began deviating from the linguistic structures of Standard Mainstream English and employing AAE phonology and morphology into her speech.
My first boyfriend was half Black and he introduced me to a new crew. Some of
the people I knew already, but the crews are different in different spots (mah first
boyfriend waz half Black and he introduced me ta ah new crew. Some a dah
people I knew already, but dah crews be different in different spots). Like
Lincoln Village has a different crew then Rancho and all of that (like Lincoln
Village gotta a different crew den Rancho and all ah dat). When I was hanging
out with Michael, the language was an attractive thing to me because it was our
way to be different than the others (when I waz hangin’ wit Michael dah language
waz ah attractive thing tah me cuz it waz our way tah be different den dah othas).
I did not know it was a second language or some shit; it was just some cool shit (I
ain’t know it waz ah second language o some shit it waz just some coo shit). But
then I was hanging around the crew more and more and it became who I am (but
den I waz hangin’ round dah crew mo and mo and it became who I is).

As Melanie began to acquire the phonological and morphological features of
AAE, she noticed the physical difference between her and her friends. Her race aligned
her with a distinct language and lifestyle that are considered interchangeable with African
American culture. The traditions and values of the African American community are
linked to years of oppression and triumph that cannot be understood by members of the
White race. Melanie’s acquisition of AAE became a way for her to fit in with Michael’s
new circle of friends; however, it did not establish her authenticity.

It does not matter what language or culture you are or have, if you are White, no
one is going to want you as part of their world (it don’ matter wad da language or
culture you is or haz if you’s White nobody goin’ want yah as part of der world).
Like in the Black Culture they don’t want any Whites up in their world and it does
not matter if you know the language or have respect for the culture, they are never
going to want you (like in Black Culture dey don’ want no Whites up in der world
and it don’ matta if you know da lingo or have respect fo dah culture dey ain’t
neva goin wantchu). I think that the Black community would rather have Asians
or Latinos speaking their language than Whites (I tink dat da Black community
would ratha have Asians or Latinos speakin’ dey language den Whites)... The
problem is I am White and nobody likes the way I speak because of that (da
problem is I’s White and don nobody like dah way I speak cuz ah dat). If I was
Black no one is going to say shit because it is normal (if I waz Black ain’t no one
gonna say shit cuz it’s normal)... People treat me different because my face does
not match my mouth (people treat me different cuz mah face don’t match my mouf)... We have all kinds of people rolling around here like Mexicans, Whites, Asians, and they are all speaking the same (we got all kinda people rollin round here like Mexicans, Whites, Asian, and dey all spekain da same).

Melanie’s encounters with Michael’s friends prompted her to evaluate the racial stereotypes that surround the White and Black cultures. Many of Michael’s friends were Hispanic or Asian and speak AAE; however, she was the only one treated differently. She struggled to understand the assumptions that others had of her and what was causing her to be rejected by Michael’s circle of friends. In the eyes of the community around her, the color of her skin dictated how she was supposed to live. Despite living in poverty and growing up in the same community as her friends, they had a predetermined vision of what life as a White girl must be like. She was only tolerated as Michael’s girlfriend, who was authentic in the community, and still faced daily challenges speaking AAE as a White girl.

The Black men had that stereotype like oh this White girl doesn’t know anything about cooking or cleaning, she has it easy, she doesn’t know what struggle is (da Black dudes had dat stereotype like oh dis White girl ain’t know nothing ’bout cookin or cleanin, she gots it easy, she ain’t know what struggle is)... To say you don’t know struggle just because of your color is some bullshit, struggle comes in every damn race (tah say yah ain’t know struggle just cuz ah your colah is some bullshit, struggle come in every damn race)... You know the world is like that, it doesn’t matter how much shit you have been through or how poor you are, if you are White then you better be prepared for that shit (you know dah world is like dat, don’ matta how much shit you done been through or how po’ you is, if you’s White den you best be prepared fo’ dat shit). Society doesn’t like Whites to act like anything other than what they think we are (society don’ like Whites tah act like anythin’ otha then whad dey think we is). Privileged mother fuckers that don’t know what struggle is (privileged motha fuckas dat ain’t know whad struggle is). I have seen a lot of Black people with nice ass cars and houses and shit and they have never struggled a day in their lives (I be seein’ hella Black people wid nice ass cars and houses and shit and dey ain’t neva struggled a day...
As Melanie struggled to gain acceptance from her new group of friends, she began to understand the dynamics of authenticity and White privilege. Growing up in the same neighborhood as her friends did nothing to solidify Melanie’s status within the community. She had to fight against the preconceived notions that she has lived a carefree life without hardships because of her skin color. As she adopted AAE, she assumed that her prevalent use of the language would exude a commonality between her boyfriend’s friends and her; however, she failed to understand the intersections of language, race, and culture. Based on societal norms, being White automatically aligns Melanie with a specific group of cultural values that are not interchangeable with any other race despite similar influences. The preconceived ideas that she has been afforded privileges, that others in the community around her have not, because of her race made her an outcast. To her new friends, she was simply known as Michael’s girlfriend with no identity and no real connection to the African American community.

You know if you are White, they think you have something, like you have something better than what they have (you know if u White dey think u got something, like u got something betta den what dey got). My ass doesn’t have a BMW or a fucking Mercedes or some nice White school for my son to go to (My ass ain’t got no BMW o fuckin Mercedes o some nice White school fo mah son to go). White is my color but my life hasn’t been the same as them White people, hell no (white is mah cola but my life ain’t been da same as dem White people, hell nah)... I never knew we got shit just because we are White (I neva knew we got shit just cuz we White). I have not had shit since I was born (I ain’t had shit since I waz born). I have been poor my whole life and my son doesn’t have shit
either (I been poor my whole life and my son ain’t got shit either)…I have seen things you don’t ever want to see, I lived through things that lots of people are never going to go through (I done seen things u ain’t neva wanna see, I lived through things dat lots ah people ain’t neva goin’ go through).

The White privilege phenomenon plays a large role in Melanie’s adoption of African American English and culture because she is constantly fighting against racial stereotypes. Her circle of friends assumes that all White people have access to luxurious cars, exceptional schools, and other extravagant things that are perceived to be unobtainable for the rest of the world. Her influences and interactions in her environment dictate what life is supposed to be like as a White woman, contrary to the reality of how her life has unfolded. Growing up in poverty, coupled with losing her parental influences at a young age, drove Melanie down a path that significantly differs from the life of ease and privilege. As she expressed her frustrations with others’ perceptions of her life, she mentioned the generational cycle of poverty into which her son has been born. Although her son is half White and half African American, he was born into a life of poverty and hardship similar to her own. Melanie acknowledged the inaccuracies of the assumptions others make that her life has been privileged because of her skin color and recognizes her son will most likely have the same experiences. As time passed, Melanie’s natural speech patterns deviated from the Standard Mainstream English she was taught in school.

The kids at school noticed the difference in me and I think even at the young age that we were, they accepted me more after I learned the language (dah kids at schoo’ notice dah difference in me an I think even at dah young age dat we waz at dey ‘cepted me mo’ afta I learned dah lingo). They were thinking like she isn’t the stuck up White bitch that we thought (dey be thinkin’ like aight she ain’t dah stuck up White bitch like we been thinkin’)…I don’t even know exactly when it happened, but there was a certain point that I just got with it (I ain’t even know
exactly when it happen, but der waz a certain point dat I just got wit it)... You are trying to blend and you are not going to blend in speaking proper school English, there is no way (you tryin’ tah blend and you ain’t goin’ blend speakin’ propa scoo English der ain’t know way). So you fit in better if you are speaking the language even if you are not affiliated you know (so yah you fit in betta if you talkin’ da lingo even if you ain’t affiliated yah know)... There are some kids you know that are going to school and looking to go to college you know, but once they are out of school they switch that language really quick (ders some kids yah know dat be goin’ tah scoo and lookin’ tah go tah college you know, but once dey outta school dey switch dat lingo real quick). A lot of Black kids know how to speak correctly in school, but there is no way they talk that talk out here on the streets (lots ah Black kids know how tah speak right in scoo, but ain’t know way dey talk dat talk out here on da streets).

Melanie understood that to gain acceptance, she needed to master AAE to establish a commonality between her and Michael’s friends. Her environment provided her with a surplus of linguistic influences that facilitated her acquisition of AAE.

Melanie used her acquisition of AAE as a tool to help her embrace a new culture that is significantly different from her own.

**Cultural Transformation**

As Melanie adopted AAE, she learned that the more she aligned with the cultural norms, the more she would be accepted in the community. The language became a staple that united Melanie and her friends together and they began to refer to her as an individual rather than as Michael’s girlfriend. They became more interested in her life and began to understand that her past and previous struggles were very similar to their own.

I picked up the slang really quick and when you are able to walk and talk and act the part then people start respecting you more (I picked up da slang real quick and when you’s able ta walk and talk and act da part den people start respectin
you mo’). Like they see you are for real in the culture and you have that respect (like dey see you’s fo real in da culture and you has dat respect). Growing up in the ‘hood areas you know all the kids roll together so you are going to pick up the language. (growin up in da ‘hood areas you know all da kids roll togetha so you’s gonna pick up da language). It is like a symbol that you are for real around here (It’s like ah symbol dat you’s fo real ’round here).

Melanie became more respected by Michael’s group of friends and was considered to be part of their gang. Being part of a gang usually requires affiliated members to perform acts of initiation to prove his or her loyalty. Female initiations are different than male initiations; however, Melanie never participated in any initiations because of her relationship with Michael. Michael’s leadership role in the gang afforded her with certain privileges that other female members were not given. Her reputation and self-image became very important to others in the gang, which prompted changes in her appearance. As the only White member of the group, she began to alter her appearance to blend in with her group.

Females do not do that initiation stuff in the same way guys do (females don’t do dat initiation stuff in da same way guyz do). Like some females have to sleep with multiple men or whatever, but I haven’t been doing that (like some females have to sleep wid multiple dudes or whatever, but I ain’t been doin that). If you are with a guy already then he isn’t going to let that happen (if you’s wid a dude already den he ain’t goin let dat happen)… It isn’t going to matter if people don’t want to accept me because I am White or I don’t know the language as good as some other bitches. I was in just because of that (it ain’t goin matta if people ain’t wanna accept me cuz I’s White or I don’t know da lingo as good as some otha bitches. I waz in just cuz ah dat). But for like a normal female or guy just walking around the streets, it is not likely they will be accepted (but fo like a normal female or dude jus walkin’ ‘round da streets it ain’t likely dey be accepted). Like if you blend in with the rest of us then maybe, but most of the time you have to know someone (Like if you blend in wid da rest of us den maybe, but most da time you gotta know someone). Like if I was walking around really clean cut and preppy then people know something is up (like if I waz walkin ‘round real clean cut and preppy den people know somethin’ up). If you do not
Once you have that bond, it is unbreakable (once you got dat bond it unbreakable). Like down here most of the young kids are joining some type of gang because you know it is a family (like down here most ah dah young kids be joinin’ some type ah gang cuz you know it’s ah family). You have never had anything, but now you do and everyone around here feels the same way (you ain’t neva had nothin’ but now you do and everyone ‘round here feel da same way). Once you are in then you have respect and that’s golden around here (once you in den you got respect and dats golden ‘round here). You know you always have 15 or 20 brothers and sisters who have your back (you know you always got 15 or 20 brothas and sistas who gotcho back)… It takes a while to prove yourself, but after Michael came around and showed me a new life, that feeling of hope came back to me (it take ah while ta prove yoself, but afta Michael came ‘round and showed me ah new life dat feelin’ of hope came back tah me). Like I felt that he filled that hole inside of me and once that happened, I have never looked back (Like I felt dat he filled dat hole inside ah me an once dat happen I ain’t neva looked back).
The loneliness that was created when Melanie’s mother died was filled by the camaraderie and love of her new family. She abandoned the cultural norms of the White race and the tenets of her upbringing to acculturate into a new community. Despite her skin color, Melanie began altering her appearance by wearing more colorful clothing and makeup. She believes African American women value a strong appearance, which includes matching clothing items and accessories. She strived to ensure her outward appearance matched her linguistic abilities in AAE. She indicated that, to be considered an authentic member of the community, her language and mannerisms needed to appear natural without artifice. In her words, once she had the whole package, the differences between the White and African American cultures no longer created a division within the gang and Melanie became an authentic member of the community. As Melanie began to feel accepted in her community, she never forgot that her face does not match her mouth and that her overall appearance does not align with the cultural norms of the White race.

To me you have to have the rest of the package to be legitimate, like the language is important, but that isn’t all there is (ta me you gots ta have da rest a da package to be legit, like da language iz important, but dat ain’t all der is). Like the style is more urbanized (like da style is mo urbanized). You know like bright colors and bright makeup and style (ya know like bright colahs and bright makeup and style). Like I am wearing bright colors a lot or certain colors to represent whatever and once you have on something your whole outfit has to match (like I be wearin bright colorz a lot or certain colahs ta rep whatever and once you got on something ya whole outfit gotta match). Like your earrings to your shoes that match the print on your shirt and your eye shadow and lipstick (like ya earrings to yah shoez dat match da print on ya shirt and ya eye shadow and lipstick)...Like the way you dress has to be popping, the hair, the makeup, even the food (like da way you dress gotta be poppin,’ da hair, da make up, even da food). Even the way you wear your shoes has to be right (even da way you wear ur shoez gotta be right). If you don’t have those things you aren’t in, you are not legitimate (if you ain’t got dos things u ain’t in, u ain’t legit). It isn’t something you can play
either, you either have it or you don’t (it ain’t somethin you can play eitha, you eitha got it or you don’t).

Race Pride Ideations

Melanie’s acculturation into the African American culture made it difficult for her to blend in with members of her own race outside of Rancho Cordova. The norms of society dictate the traditional appearance of Whites and African Americans, and any contradiction to the norms has consequences. Melanie’s linguistic ability in AAE was puzzling to outsiders, but coupled with her appearance, it made many people suspicious of her intentions. African Americans who did not know her were unsure if she was authentic or if she was mocking their language and culture. When other Whites came upon her, they bestowed heavy stares and vulgar remarks upon her. Because her appearance and language did not culturally align with the White race, many Whites coined her White trash. Melanie did not anticipate the negative reactions that members of the White and African American communities would have about her appearance, and she struggled to navigate her feelings.

If you are for real down here you have to know how to act, talk, dress, all of that (if you be fo’ real down here you gotta know how ta act, talk, dress, all ah dat). For me it was all over the day I met Michael because I learned the language and the steps (fo’ me it waz all ova dah dey I met Michael cuz I learned dah lingo an dah steps). I didn’t know what was outside of Rancho you know (I ain’t even know what waz outside Rancho ya know). I didn’t know the world was this fucked up, but it is (I ain’t know dah world waz dis fucked up, but it iz). Other Whites hear the way I talk and they are thinking like damn this White trash and then you have the other side with the Blacks and they are like who the fuck do you think you are talking like us (otha Whites hear dah way ah talk and dey be thinkin’ like damn dis White trash and den you got da otha side wit dah Blacks and dey be like who da fuck you think you is talkin’ like us). Michael is never going to understand because he isn’t White (Michael ain’t neva gonna understand cuz he
“ain’t White). Even if he doesn’t hate like the others, he doesn’t understand there are others hating (even if he ain’t hatin’ like da othas he ain’t undastand der be othas hatin’). At 13, you don’t know what the world is like, I never could have known that being White meant you have to do shit a certain way (at 13, you ain’t know what da world like, I neva coulda known dat bein’ White meant you gotta do shit ah certain way).

Leaving home at a young age and surrounding herself with a new culture laid the foundation for the excessive amount of negative attention Melanie would receive as she grew up. At age 13, she had no knowledge of the intersections of culture, language, and society’s pressures to conform to racial norms. Her mother and stepfather never exposed her to the world where many will judge you based on the color of your skin. Without regard for the societal conflicts that would ensue, she adopted a language and culture to become part of a family that had grown to respect and accept her. As a White woman speaking AAE, Melanie looked to Michael and her new family for support and understanding. They were unable to offer her a satisfactory explanation as to why she was not accepted in other communities because they could not understand what she was experiencing. She was the only White woman in a gang of predominantly Hispanic and African American men, and they could not help her through her transformation. Melanie began to understand the powerful hold that race has on our society and that she would never be able to escape racial stereotypes.

Back in the day, lots of people were asking me why I am wearing so much makeup and why my earrings are so damn big and all that shit (back in da day, hella people be like askin me why I be wearin so much makeup and why mah earrings so damn big and all dat shit). People think it is an act you know because I am White (people think it’s an act ya know cuz I’s White). White people aren’t supposed to look like me (White people ain’t ‘posed ta look like me). I have no
problems with it, it’s everybody else that gives me shit for it (*I ain’t got no problems wit it, it errbody else dat give me shit for it*).

The diversity in the city of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County in general makes the likelihood that members of other racial groups will adopt AAE and culture very high. The large number of African Americans in the city of Rancho Cordova has a large influence on the dominant language and culture of the city. Many Hispanic and Asian youth adopt African American language and culture to fit in with the dominant population in the same manner as Melanie. The dominant language and culture of a city is likely to influence the growing youth, and it is not surprising to most people that some Hispanic and Asian kids adopt African American language and culture. Melanie understands she is not the only person of a different race who speaks AAE; however, she receives more criticism than they do. Based on her encounters with people of other races, Melanie is held to a higher standard because she was born with the “privilege” of being White. Societal norms indicate that Melanie’s light skin automatically aligns her with afforded privileges that members of other races do not have. Because of the preconceived idea of White privilege, Melanie will always receive more negative attention than her Hispanic and Asian friends even though they speak and act identically. She would always have the acceptance of her family; however, this acceptance did not spread to all members of the African American community in Rancho Cordova.

Like growing up everybody had an image in their minds of what a White girl should do (*like growin’ up errbody got ah image in dah mind ah what a White girl should do*). The shit they should wear and the way they have to talk and all that shit (*dah shit dey should wear and dah way day gotta talk n all dat shit*). Back in the day my sister could braid my hair up real nice and it looked
popping (back in dah day my sista could braid mah hair up real nice and it look poppin’). At school all the Black bitches were saying we are not shit just some poor White trash trying to be with it (at scoo all dah Black bitches be sayin’ we ain’t shit jus some po’ trash tryin’ be wit it). They don’t see the language the culture none of that shit, they see the color of my face (dey don’ see da lingo da culture none ah dat shit, dey see dah cola ah mah face). They don’t see I am just like them and I have been in this neighborhood for my whole damn life (dey ain’t see I be jus like dem and I done been in dis ‘hood for mah whole damn life)...They have a visual in their minds of what a White bitch is supposed to be and it isn’t me (dey gots a visual in dey mind ah whad a White bitch suppode dah be an it ain’t me).

Melanie’s experiences with Black women in her community solidified her hypothesis about society’s views of the White race. Based on her encounters, she understood that people around her would never evaluate her authenticity based on her proficiency in the language or her adherence to the culture, but only on the color of her skin. People she has known and grown up with for years refuse to see past her skin color and accept her as part of their community. The lists of what is considered appropriate for Whites and African Americans was predetermined many years ago and Melanie had a tremendous amount of difficulty trying to deviate from it. She braided her hair in the cornrow style because most of her peers had similar hairstyles; she did not know this hairstyle is not traditional for someone of the White race. Members of the African American community outside of her circle of friends had no reason to believe she was an authentic member of their community; therefore, they called her White trash. Presenting oneself as anything other than the stereotypical image of a White woman was not tolerated by women in the African American community.

Those Black men love some White girls with big booties (dos Black dudes be lovin’ some White girls wit big booties). Like they don’t care about the whole
White thing, if they like what they see they are about to get at it (like dey don’t care ‘bout da whole White thing, if dey like what dey see dey ‘bout tah get at it)…The problem is the Black women (da problem is da Black women). They don’t like any White girls with their Black men (dey ain’t like no White girls wit der Black dudes )…When I was with my man for only a month or so, this Black girl was all in my shit looking to talk trash to me and she was spreading rumors, but it was never true (when I waz with mah man fo only a mont or so dis Black girl waz all in mah shit lookin ta talk trash ta me and she be spreadin rumors, but it neva waz true). They were calling me names and shit at school yah know (dey be callin’ me names and shit at scoo and ya know)…The struggle became real after my mom died and I haven’t given a shit about no one after that (da struggle got real afta mah mom died and I ain’t gave a shit ‘bout no one afta dat). So all them bitches who are dogging me aren’t anything (so all dem bitches who be doggin’ me ain’t nothing). I am like yah I see you swinging, but I am dodging the blows boo (I be like yah I see you swingin’, but I be dodging dem blows boo).

Melanie explores the differences between African American men and women and their perceptions of White women like her. Her adoption of African American culture and language did not seem to bother African American men in her community. The African American men in her family hesitated to trust her because of her skin color; however, her language and relationship with an African American man was never an issue. As Melanie continued her relationship with Michael, she received heavy criticism from the African American women in her community. She gravitated more toward Michael’s friends and had few female friends because of the reputation she had at school. Some of the young African American girls called her names and never created a comfortable environment for her at school. The attitudes and behaviors of her classmates prompted Melanie to stay even closer to her family and to stop attending classes. After she accumulated an excessive number of absences she was expelled from Cordova High School. She was transferred to Kinney High School in Rancho Cordova where she was
able to earn her high school diploma in 2007. As Melanie’s son grew older, she began to infiltrate different communities and struggled to avoid the confrontations with disapproving members of the White community. Not only was she in an interracial relationship, she spoke a language that was unintelligible to most Whites, and she was adorned in vibrant clothing and makeup.

One time, Michael and me were walking around that ritzy mall in Roseville and damn we were attracting attention (one time, me and Carlos waz walkin ’round dat bougie mall in Roseville and damn we waz attractin attention)… One older lady said some shit to her daughter as we were walking by and I was ready to pounce on her ass (one olda lady said some shit ta her daughter as we waz walkin by and I waz ready ta pounce on her ass). I didn’t hear what she said, but I looked at her and was like who the hell do you think you are talking to (I ain’t hear what she said, but I looked at her and waz like who da hell you think you talkin’ to). She tried saying some shit like I was worried about your safety maybe this dude is using you and I just got really pissed (she tried sayin some shit like I was worried ’bout yo safety maybe dis dude is usin you and I just got real pissed). She was acting like she has concern for me, but she is actually talking shit (she actin’ like she has concern fo’ me, but she actually talkin shit). Most of the time I am not looking to travel outside of my lines because you have to know what you are about to get when you do that (most of da time I ain’t lookin ta travel outside mah lines cuz you gotta know what you ‘bout tah get when you do dat). My grandmother told me a long time ago that I need to hang with my kind and do what the Bible says and shit (mah grandma told me long time ago dat I need ta hang wit mah kind and do what da Bible says and shit). Like she is thinking men who are of a different race are looking to get at White girls just to say they did, like a tally mark (like she be thinkin’ dudes who of ah different race be lookin’ ta get at White girls just ta say dey did, like ah tally mark).

As Melanie branched out to different cities, she began to attract negative attention based on the way she looked. For many middle class and affluent people, her vibrant clothing and makeup was very startling because her style is not conducive to traditional White norms. Her style coupled with her African American boyfriend made the other
community members look at her more closely. Her assessment of the situation indicated she believes society is not accepting of interracial relationships; however, she did not consider others’ reactions to her appearance. In Rancho Cordova, the style of dress is very urbanized and although it is common there, it is uncommon in other surrounding cities, especially for Whites. Melanie’s familial influences, including her stepfather and grandfather, engrained in her that she should only have relationships with others who look like her. When the White woman and her daughter were looking at Melanie and her family, she believed they were looking at the difference in race between her and Michael. Rather than make the assumption that Whites were looking at her nontraditional style as a White woman, she assumed the women were looking negatively at her relationship.

Whether the White women were concerned with her interracial relationship or her style, Melanie understood that she would not be accepted in communities outside of Rancho Cordova. She would not be able to walk around the local mall speaking AAE and exuding her adoption of African American culture without being stigmatized. Walking outside of her lines is indicative of Melanie’s understanding that others outside of Rancho Cordova would not treat her the same. Her experiences in affluent areas with a population that is predominately White highlight the differences between Melanie and other members of the White race.

White people hate on each other probably more than any other race because you know you have your levels of White (White people hate on each otha prolly mo den any otha race cuz ya know you got yo levels of White). If you are a wealthy White person, you are not going to be cool with a sister like me (if you ah bougie ass cracka you ain’t gone be cool wit a sista like me). Like you feel like you are better than me anyway because you have money and all of that (Like you feel like
you’s betta den me anyway cuz you gots money and all dat)…Rich White bitches are in a class all their own so they expect me to do crazy shit like live in the ‘hood and dress and act differently (rich White bitches in a class all dey own so dey expect me tah do crazy shit like live in da ‘hood and dress and act different). Like the whole White trash thing you know (like dat whole White trash thing ya know). I am not trash, but that’s how they see it (I ain’t trash, but dats how dey see it). Like they don’t have love for people who are the same color as them (like dey ain’t got no love for people who’s dah same cola az dem)... Whites even fight against each other for that status. There is no loyalty in the White race, none (Whites even fight against each otha fo’ dat status. Ain’t know loyalty to da White race, none).

Melanie assumed that because she shares the commonality of race, other Whites would accept her for who she is. She speaks a language and has adopted a culture that do not align with the White language and culture, but identifies as White. The structural tenets of the White race are heavily based on White privilege and a White individual’s level of whiteness. White privilege dictates that members of the White race are entitled to advantages to which people of color do not have access, based on race alone (Amesen, 2002; Warren, 1999). The hierarchy of whiteness indicates the level to which a White person adheres to the social and political values of being White (Warren, 1999).

Because Melanie does not adhere to the traditional culture and linguistic profile of a White woman, other Whites view her as White trash. Being called White trash informs Melanie that her lack of loyalty to White norms places her at the bottom of the whiteness hierarchy. The symbol of White trash indicates that an individual has been ostracized by his or her community and represents the lowest class of Whites. Melanie indicated that other Whites fight each other to achieve an affluent lifestyle to show off their privilege and power and to achieve high social status. Her experiences with other Whites outside
of her community have solidified in her mind that Whites are more united based on
similar social classes rather than being of the same race. Melanie is looking for the same
level of acceptance and loyalty from the White race as she has witnessed from the
African Americans in her community.

My friend down the street went up to the McDonald’s off of Hazel to ask for a job
(my homie down dah street went up to dah McDonald’s off ah Hazel tah ask fo’ a
job). He looks ‘hood and talks ‘hood and he was asking for a job (he look ‘hood
he talk ‘hood and he be askin’ fo ah job). The manager over there is a big middle
class Black man and he gave my friend a job (dah manager ova der is a big ol’
middle class Black dude and he done gave mah friend ah job)… That dumbass
got a job because he is the same color as the man that hired him (dat dumb ass
gotta job cuz he dah same cola as dah dude dat higha him). They are from
different worlds, but he still got the job (dey’s from different worlds, but he still
got dah job)… He has money, or enough money and my friend doesn’t have shit,
but he is still willing to help the brother out (He got money o enough money and
my friend ain’t got shit, but he still willin’ tah help da brotha out). That is never
going to happen with a White manager and me, even in the ‘hood (dat ain’t neva
goin’ happen wit me and ah White manager even in da ‘hood). I look and sound
the same as all the brothers and sisters out here, but they are going to be better off
than me because a middle class or affluent Black person is going to take a chance
on a poor Black dude (I be lookin’ and soundin’ dah same as all dah brothas and
sistas out here, but deys goin’ be betta off den me cuz ah middle class o bougie
ass Black person goin’ take a chance on ah po’ ass Black dude).

The intersections of race and social class are very complex and appear to be fluid
depending on the traditions of a specific race. Melanie displayed a strong distaste for
members of her own race who are of a different social class because of the lack of
camaraderie she feels with other Whites. Her language and culture have solidified her
place on the lowest wrung of the whiteness hierarchy, and she does not believe Whites
show loyalty to other Whites of a lower social class. Whites who live lifestyles similar to
Melanie, and have deviated from the cultural values of the White race, are ostracized by
Whites of higher social classes. The White race is based upon the foundation that members have been given an extra set of privileges and opportunities because of their skin color; therefore, Whites who reject these privileges have no value. Melanie is looking for members of the White race to show her the same loyalty her African American friend was shown when he applied for a job in a middle class neighborhood. After years of judgments and mistreatment from other Whites, Melanie has developed the perception that social class is more important than race for Whites. Whites who exhibit the wealth and power associated with White privilege do not associate with poor Whites despite being of the same race. If Melanie went to a middle class White neighborhood to apply for a job, she would not have the same opportunities as her African American friend. Middle class Whites would not be sympathetic toward her because societal norms associate her skin color with privileges; therefore, if she has thrown away those privileges it is her own fault.

On the contrary, the African American community is very unified and does not have the same social hierarchy that is prominent within the White race. Melanie’s friend was able to obtain a job in a middle class neighborhood because he and the hiring manager are of the same race. Years of oppression and struggle have united the African American community in ways that cannot be understood by members of the White race. If a member of the African American community is struggling, it is common for the community to unite and help one another. For the African American community, race is more important than social class and the loyalty they display toward one another is
significantly different than that of the White race. Melanie has lived in both worlds for years and is aware that neither community is going to accept the way she is. Whether the issue is race or social class, Melanie exhibits the cultural traits of an African American woman but has the skin color of a White woman. Although the community of Rancho Cordova has validated her authenticity, when she walks outside of her lines, she will continue to struggle for acceptance from both the White and African American communities. Despite Melanie’s challenges in both communities, she cannot revert to speaking Standard Mainstream English. She has been immersed in African American English and culture for so long that she is unable to speak her first language. After age 13, she stopped using Standard Mainstream English and has experienced a language loss.

I have been running with my crew for so long like the need to use proper English isn’t there (I been runnin wit my crew fo so long like da need to use propa English ain’t der)…If I try to think about the proper words then yes maybe I could do it, but it isn’t natural for me now (if I try like ta think ‘bout da propa words den maybe yah I could do it, but it ain’t natural fo me now)… I have never learned how to write any other way than when I was in school (I ain’t neva learn how tah write any otha way den when I waz in scoo’). Like the little Black kids on the street they have never learned how to write Black so they write White because that is what they have learned in school (like dah lil’ Black kids on dah street dey ain’t neva learn how tah write Black so dey write White cuz dats whad dey done learned in scoo’)...But I know the difference hell yah and most Black kids they grow up knowing the difference (but I knows dah difference hell yah and most Black kids dey grow up knowin’ da difference). For me, I have been speaking the language for more than 10 years and I have to try really hard to talk proper (fo’ me I been speakin’ dah lingo for mo’ den 10 yearz an’ I has tah try real hard tah talk propa). It is English and it makes sense it is just different from school English (it English and it make sense it just different from scoo English)...I am not about to go back and forth, there is no reason to (I ain’t ‘bout tah go back n’ forf).
The use of a new language for a prolonged period of time coupled with limited or no use of the primary language produces a language loss. Melanie has not used her primary language of Standard Mainstream English since she was 13 years old and can no longer demonstrate proficiency in that language. Although Standard Mainstream English and AAE are both English dialects, linguistically the two are very different. Melanie refers to Standard Mainstream English as school English or proper English because she is used to others degrading her use of AAE. She has maintained her ability to read and write Standard Mainstream English at a high school equivalency level, but does not engage in activities that require her to use it. Many African American children grow up speaking AAE, but are taught to use Standard Mainstream English in school. At young ages, AAE speaking children are told that speaking their primary language is not appropriate in school.

Jesse is speaking like me in the classroom and those teachers are correcting him left and right (Jesse be speakin’ like me in da classroom and dose teachas be correctin’ him left and right). He knows the way to speak proper and he knows now that the language he has been learning his whole life is different than the norm (He know da way tah speak propa, an he know now dat dah lingo he done been learnin’ his whole life be different den da normal). The same goes for all the little Black kids in school (same goes fo all da lil Black kids in dah scoo’).

From a young age, AAE speaking children are taught to abandon their primary language in school and transition into Standard Mainstream English. The inability for African American children to speak their language inside the classroom further highlights the importance of the language inside the home. The African American community associates AAE with years of cultural heritage and tradition that cannot be shared by
members of other racial groups. Adopting African American language and culture is likely to spark controversy from many African American communities, especially if adopted by a member of the White race. Melanie will always have to balance the negative criticisms from both the White and African American communities as a White woman who has adopted AAE and culture.

The diversity in urban Rancho Cordova has exposed Melanie to a language and culture that is very different from White culture. Her experiences living and attending school in this city have greatly influenced her language and style. She exhibits many of the same phonological and morphological features of AAE as a Black speaker does, and her acquisition of AAE has made her a target for ridicule amongst some members of the White and Black communities. Throughout her interviews, she consistently referenced the mannerisms and behaviors that she should uphold because she is White. Her style and use of AAE do not align with the standards of Whiteness; therefore, she is referred to as White trash. Melanie discusses her place on the White social hierarchy and the assumed White privileges that are nonexistent in her life. Speaking AAE causes her to be referred to as White trash by the White community and requires authenticity for acceptance into the Black community. Analyzing Melanie’s experiences with Whiteness, White trash, authenticity, and her use of AAE will help shape society’s understanding of Whites who defy the norms of White culture. A person’s skin color is not the only factor involved in a person’s linguistic and cultural acquisition. “Sounding black (or white) is not rooted in genetics or physiology, but influenced by society and culture” (Rickford &
Rickford, 2000, p. 102). As a White woman living in a Black and Latino urban community, Melanie’s acquisition of AAE is a direct reflection of the cultural and linguistic styles of her community members.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

It isn’t natural speaking the language as a White bitch and nobody wants it (*it ain’t natural speakin’ dah lingo az a White bitch an ain’t nobody wan’ it*). On the phone hell yah I could pass for a Black woman, but once they see my color it is all over (*on dah phone hell yah I could pass fo’ a Black woman, but once dey see mah cola it al ova*)...I do Black better then some Blacks do Black, but it does not mean anything in some of their eyes (*I do Black betta den some Blacks do Black, but ain’t mean nothin’ in some ah dey eyez*). I am White and that is never going to be good enough, simple as that (*I’s White an dat ain’t neva goin’ be good enough, simple az dat*). It is not an act for me either, but the world is never going to understand (*it ain’t no act fah me eitha, but da world ain’t neva goin’ undahstand*). (Melanie)

Chapter 5 offers conclusions for the ethnographic investigation. The research questions that served as the foundation for the study were as follows:

1. The common phonological and morphological features used by White speakers of African American English.
2. The perceptions of Whites on racial stereotypes and adoption of AAE and culture and the impact on race, culture, and language.

The ethnographic research study was centered on one White woman’s adoption of African American English and culture. AAE phonology and morphology has been heavily researched by linguists for the past 40 years (Baron, 1997; Baugh, 1983, 2000; Bucholtz, 2011; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Several prominent literary works, including *Spoken Soul* and *Black Street Speech*, contain the interviews and analyses of hundreds of AAE speakers, all of whom identify as African American. The historical emphasis of AAE highlights the African roots of African American speech and its
connection to hundreds of years of culture (Rickford, n.d.). The linguistic features of a
White person adopting AAE and African American culture have only been sporadically
researched. AAE is typically studied using participants who identify as African
American. Bucholtz (2011), Cutler (1999), Kitwana (2005), and Morris (2006) are
among the few authors who have studied African American spoken by Whites. As
discussed previously, several issues arise when White speakers adopt a culture and
language that does not align with the norms of their group affiliation, either ethnically or
racially.

Hewitt (1986) conducted a study in Great Britain, investigating the reasons White
adolescents adopt African American English and culture. The results of his study
indicated that some White adolescents in primarily White neighborhoods pass through a
phase in which they display cultural allegiance with African Americans. Many White
teenagers adopted linguist features and styles based on stereotypical conceptions of gangs
and African American urban street culture (Hewitt, 1986). The need for Melanie to fit in
and survive in her natural environment prompted her adoption of African American
English and culture. She no longer had a strong maternal influence in her life, and she
wanted to become part of Michael’s new family. Through Michael’s lifestyle, she was
gradually introduced into the African American urban gang culture. Her clothing and
makeup choices began to change and ultimately she adopted African American language
and culture, a direct reflection of the influences around her and what it meant to be
considered authentic by those with whom she wanted to affiliate.
Authenticity is the integral component to being accepted by the target group. In Melanie’s case, this was the local African American community of her hometown. “If you are for real down here you have to know how to act, talk, dress, all of that (if you be fo’ real down here you gotta know how ta act, talk, dress, all ah dat).” Authenticity plays an important role in African American communities because it represents the person’s respect and natural allegiance to the African American culture. African American language and culture embody a specific body language, fashion, style, sensibility, and worldview (Kitwana, 2005). For decades, hip hop culture stemmed from young African Americans in urban communities throughout the United States. In the mid-1970s, hip hop pioneer Afrika Bambaata introduced the elements of hip hop culture, which included graffiti, art, breakdancing, rapping, and deejaying (Kitwana, 2005). As hip hop culture evolved over the years, it became a public platform for young African Americans to voice their years of struggle and oppression. The hip hop culture in the African American community became a voice for the voiceless and embodied a cultural inclusiveness that does not extend to other racial groups (Kitwana, 2005). Since the 1970s and the introduction of hip hop culture, White youth have been fascinated with the adoption of Black culture (Kitawana, 2005).

Many whites are attracted to the fashion and style associated with African American language and culture but lack the authentic environment. The popularity of White rappers Eminem and Paul Wall have encouraged White youth to attempt to become part of the African American culture. However, many Whites who attempt to
adopt African American language and culture have social groups that are primarily White. White kids may present themselves as authentic members of the community without having any African American influences. Many White youth have been accused of “trying to steal Black culture and water it down” (Wimsatt, 1994, p. 28). These inauthentic attempts are considered disrespectful to the African American community and “decontextualize what African American culture came from and what it is about” (Wimsatt, 1994, p. 86). In many instances, Whites have been physically assaulted and seriously injured by rival African American gangs for mocking the culture and language. In Cutler’s study (1999), her participant Mike, a White AAE speaker, was attacked by a rival gang and had both of his arms broken by a baseball bat. He was also shoved through a sliding glass door, which cut through several tendons and a nerve in each of his wrists. Mike spoke AAE; however, he lived in an upper class Manhattan neighborhood and went to a private school. He attempted to fit in with the African American gang culture by experimenting with drugs, spraying graffiti on buildings, and having frequent run-ins with the police. After being seriously injured on numerous occasions and being rejected by the African American gang culture, Mike reverted back to speaking Standard English (Cutler, 1999).

Whites perceived to be inauthentic and who attempt to assimilate into African American communities can provoke dangerous consequences. As a White woman, Melanie knew the importance of being considered authentic in her community and cut all her previous ties to White cultural norms.
You cannot walk up in here thinking you are tight and sly with it because if you do that you are fitting to get cut (you cain’t walk up in her thinkin’ u is tight and sly wit it cuz if you do dat you fittin’ ta get cut). We do not play about that (we don’t play bout dat). We have names for those kinds of people (we gots names fo dos kinda people).

While many White kids’ “fascination with hip hop go no further than a desire to learn the latest Usher dance moves,” Melanie’s adoption of African American language and culture as a White speaker are authentic (Kitwana, 2005, p. 9).

Melanie’s adoption of African American language and culture as a White speaker is not rare. Many Whites as well as those of other ethnic groups, who grow up in urban neighborhoods with primarily African American influences, adopt speech patterns very similar to Melanie’s (Morris, 2006). During the late 1990s and early 2000s when Melanie grew up, African American youth culture emerged as the most influential form of youth culture both nationally and internationally (Bucholtz, 2008). The diverse racial makeup of Sacramento County during Melanie’s childhood fully immersed her in African American language and culture. Cutler (1999) indicated that for some White teenage boys and girls, the adoption of AAE speech patterns might be a survival strategy. As noted previously in Chapter 4, Melanie’s boyfriend Michael introduced her to a new linguistic and cultural world after the passing of her mother. To fit in with his friends and the gang culture, Melanie assimilated into her surroundings and became an authentic AAE speaker.

The appropriation of AAE language and culture is not a new phenomenon and has long provided a rich source of inspiration for Whites and others in the US and around the
world (Cutler, 1999). Although Melanie is not the first White woman to adopt AAE and African American culture, she will always be subjected to criticisms from both the White and Black communities. Historically, there has been a growing divergence between Black and White vernaculars that acts as a symptomatic split between the Black and White communities of our society (Labov, 1987). The long-standing stereotypes regarding what is accepted and what is not, according to race, will continue to impact Melanie’s life. Her adoption of African American language and culture as a White speaker defy the cultural norms of the White race and are not accepted by all African American communities. Although Melanie is an accepted member in the African American community of Rancho Cordova, her authenticity will always be questioned in other communities.

The analyses of this thesis clearly establish the need for future research in this domain. White speakers of African American English, specifically women, are often misunderstood and their intentions are misinterpreted. The use of AAE by a White speaker is often viewed as an inauthentic attempt to be “cool;” however, the number of authentic White AAE speakers is growing. Poor urban Whites who grow up in predominately African American neighborhoods will be influenced by the language and culture (Morris, 2006). Although the relationship between race and youth has been of interest to several researchers, there is only a small body of research pertaining to the linguistic styles and racial dimensions of white youth identities (Bucholtz, 2011). The implications of this research suggest that Whites adopting African American language
and culture is not a new phenomenon and is representative of a new shift in racial norms. Public schools have increasingly become sites of ongoing cross-racial encounters, as school populations become “majority minority” not only in California but all across the United States (Prescott, 2008). Prescott’s research suggests that neighborhoods are predominantly composed of people of color, therefore increasing the likelihood that Whites as well as other racial groups will adopt the language and style of the dominant culture.

For many years alternate racial groups have been enamored with African American language and culture. Many Whites have attempted to acquire African American language and culture because of the historical, social, and political power associated with it (Kitwana, 2005). However, attempts to adopt the African American language and culture are made across several racial groups. Many racial groups, including White, Latino, Asian, and Native American, are “taking from popular culture what they find useful, fashioning it to local needs, claiming it as their own and in the process placing their own stamp on it” (Kitwana, 2005, p. 3). Over the span of many years, heavy fascination with African American language and culture has prompted many racial groups to attempt to adopt certain cultural characteristics. These inauthentic attempts disregard the history and traditions associated with African American language and culture; therefore, most authentic speakers are not readily accepted. Poor Whites like Melanie, who grow up in urban environments with a predominantly African American population, will adopt the language and culture of the dominant group.
In poor urban communities where African American gang culture is prevalent, community members will adopt African American language and culture to survive. After Melanie's mother died, she adopted African American English and gang culture to survive in her neighborhood. Melanie’s family is very similar to many immigrant families who move to the United States with little to no money. The children of these families will adopt the language and culture of their peers, regardless of race.

Growing up in the ‘hood areas you know all the kids roll together so you are going to pick up the language (growin up in da ‘hood areas you know all da kids roll togetha so you’s gonna pick up da language). It’s like a symbol that you are for real around here (it’s like ah symbol dat you’s fo real ’round here)...Not everyone who is speaking it is African American (ain’t everyone who’s speakin it African American). We have all kinds of people rolling around here like Mexicans, Whites, Asian, and they are all speaking the same (we got all kinda people rollin round here like Mexicans, Whites, Asian, and dey all speakin da same).

In recent decades, Sacramento has experienced tremendous population growth mostly driven by new immigrants arriving from Latin America and Asia (Public Policy Institute of California, n.d.). As they arrive, immigrant and refugee families will move to poor urban areas and attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture of those communities. In the future, the faces of AAE speakers in these urban communities will change (Morgan, 1998). The need to assimilate and survive in poor urban communities will prompt alternate cultural groups (Eastern European, Latin American, Middle Eastern etc.) to authentically adopt African American English and culture.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Raw Interview Data

Interview #1

K: Have you ever been into White dudes?

M: Nah neva. Not even back in da day. Mah mom waz always coo wit it ya know she was real open minded. She ain’t neva had religion so she waz open ta mo things. Mah dad ain’t though, he hate on everyone. He kinda religious, but da culture is dat way. Ya know da dudes have all da control ova dey wives o kids. I think she went through some shit back in da country and just wanted ta get outta der dats why she waz wit his dumb ass.

K: So he brought her here?

M: Yah dey came here wit me ta Lincoln Village and den to Rancho den to Arden den back ta Rancho. Always to dah ‘hood areas yah know.

K: Is that where it all started?

M: Yah it don’t seem like a big thang ta me cuz I’ve been here fo eva . I know nottin else

K: When were you first aware of African American English being your primary language?

M: It ain’t like I flipped a switch o somethin, I grew up around dis so ta me it always been my first language. Like it ain’t a good question cuz like mah lingo is a part a me and I neva done had a moment when I waz like damn I speakin different. Da problem is I’s White and don nobody like dah way I speak cuz ah dat. If I waz Black ain’t no one gonna say shit cuz it’s normal. Ah betta question is when did I know people waz gonna treat me different cuz mah face don’t match my mouf. I waz bout 13 years old in da 8th grade. Mah first boyfriend waz straight Black and he introduced me ta ah new crew. Some a dah people I knew already, but dah crews be different in different spots. Like Lincoln Village gotta a different crew den Rancho and all ah dat.

K: Do you remember when you first started noticing a difference in the way people treat you?

M: Yah it waz like 99’ I think right befo I left Mitchell. You ‘member back in da day round dat time when Big Willie style came out ya know Will Smith. Dat waz mah jam.
Mah stepdad hate dat shit ya know. I waz dealin wit da pain of losin’ mah mom and I would listen ta dat CD ova and ova again. Just dah two ah us. At dat time I noticed fo dah first time dat da way I was actin and talkin waz not ok fah someone of mah colah. Mah mom alwayz made me feel free tah be me, yah she was open ta all types a people. But mah stepdad wasn’t havin it. He used ta interrogate all mah friends and boyfriends and say mean shit. Mah first boyfriend he ain’t neva let him in dah house ta see me, he waz only allowed outside. It waz cuz ah him I knew I waz different. He let me know dat no White girl should be talkin and actin like me. But wat da fuck he think would happen? When you raised in da ‘hood you gotta spect’ dat tah happen.

K: So is that what contributed to your adoption of African American English?

M: I guess I dunno. Like I said I ain’t eva decided one day tah start talkin different. Dis is what we do ‘round her. I guess like when I waz in grade school it waz different cuz my mom waz here and she ain’t let me outside all night ta run da streets yah know. I went tah school and went home ta be wit her. Afta she die my stepdad got custody ah me, but he waz neva der like dat fa me. He waz busy wit his own shit. Even at AM Winn dough kids be talkin like me so ain’t neva waz a time dat I didn’t hear it. Dah only reason I know dat White people talk different is cuz mah step dad let me know. It ain’t like I chose tah switch o somethin.’ We don really use dat term African American English cuz it means dat da way we speak ain’t English. It English and it make sense it just different from scoo English yah know.

K: Do you think you can go back and forth between the two languages? Between Standard Mainstream English and African American English?

M: Nah it ain’t easy like dat no mo. Like I been runnin wit my crew fo so long like da need to use propa English ain’t der. If I try like ta think ‘bout da propa words den maybe yah I could do it, but it ain’t natural fo me now. I can write real good fo da most part, but it’s kinda like what ya see is whatca get.

K: Why do you identify AAE as your primary language?

M: In da beginning like when I waz young I picked up da slang real quick and when you’s able ta walk and talk and act da part den people start respectin you mo.’ Like dey see you’s fo real in da culture and you has dat respect. Growin up in da ‘hood areas you know all da kids roll togetha so you’s gonna pick up da language. It’s like ah symbol dat you’s fo real ‘round here. I ain’t understand why dey call it African American English. Ain’t everyone who’s speakin it African American. We got all kinda people rollin round here like Mexicans, Whites, Asian, and dey all spekain da same. Go ta Oakland and dey got White kids runnin’ around talkin like me. Ta me you gots ta have da rest a da package to be legit, like da language iz important, but dat ain’t all der is.
K: So other than the language what other things do you need to have or be a part of to be considered legit or authentic?

M: Well da language is da numba one thing, but des people ‘round here can smell a rat. Like you cain’t walk up in here thinkin’ u is tight and sly wit it cuz if you do dat you fittin’ ta get cut. We don’t play bout dat. We gots names fó dos kinda people, but I ain’t goin say em cuz Jesse here but jus know dat ain’t goin happen. Ta be cool wit us you gotta have a whole buncha shit. Like da way you dress gotta be poppin,’ da hair, da make up, even da food. Like you gotta know how ta cook legit food. Even da way you wear ur shoez gotta be right. Like I ain’t wearin my chuckz like you wear em, see mines folded ova. If you ain’t got dos things u ain’t in, u ain’t legit. It ain’t somethin you can play eitha, you eitha got it or you don’t.

K: What specifically though identifies you more closely with the culture? You mentioned your style of clothes and make-up, but what specifically about them?

M: Like da style is mo urbanized. Ya know like bright colahs and bright make up and style. Like I be wearin bright colorz a lot or certain colahs ta rep whatever and once you got on something ya whole outfit gotta match. Like ya earrings to yah shoez dat match da print on ya shirt and ya eyeshadow and lipstick. Back in da day when I waz workin at McDonald’s hella people be like askin me why I be wearin so much make up and why mah earrings so damn big and all dat shit. Dis one White lady axed me one day ‘bout da price of a Big Mac and she ain’t like da way I answered so she starts talkin all dis trash ‘bout my dumb White ass and how I’s should be in scoo and shit. I waz like bitch I’m natcho damn child don’t be sweatin’ me. People think it’s an act ya know cuz I’s White. White people ain’t possed ta look like me but ya’ll need ta educate yoselfs cuz race don’t mean a god damn thing. Da only colah dat matters iz dat green, if you ain’t got it you ain’t shit.

K: Do you feel like the way you talk, and dress have any influence on the way members of the Black and White communities outside of Rancho think about you?

M: Oh hell yah. People outside ah here don’ like it when you ain’t look da part. Like a White girl possed ta be in her Abercrombie clothz and supa propa wit her speech and all dat shit. If you look different den what you possed ta look like, you fixin ta have problems. Society don’ like dat shit and dey don’ like no mixed relationships eitha. One time me and Carlos waz walkin ‘round dat bougie mall in Roseville and damn we waz attractin attention. Like dey don’ like no White girl wit no mixed dude, hell nah. One olda lady said some shit to her daughter as we waz walkin by and I waz ready ta pounce on her ass. I ain’t hear what she said, but I looked at her and waz like who da hell you think you talkin’ to? All dis hollarin and shit you doin I know you ain’t talkin bout me.
She tried sayin some shit like I waz worried ‘bout yo safety maybe dis dude is usin you and I just got real pissed. She actin’ like she has concern fo’ me, but she actually talkin’ shit. I just walked away from her be fo I be lookin’ ta whip dat ass. I waz like you tried it girl and you betta be glad I ain’t tryin ta go ta jail. Dats what happens dough when you walk outside yo lines. Ain’t nobody like it and ain’t nobody tryin ta understand. Bougie ass Roseville, most dem bitches be lookin’ a hot mess and dey all racist as fuck

K: Was that lady White?

M: Yah she White, but it don’t matta. Ta be honest da White not as bad as dah Black people when it comes tah dat shit cuz Whites be used ta the mixed races. Ya got Black, Latino, Asian, and all dem otha races and da likelihood dat a White bitch be wida a dude from anotha race is high yah know. Since America is so different ya know wit all da mixin’ of dah races White people be mo’ used ta it. Dey don’t like it, but it ain’t no big thang ta most Whites. Da problem is da Black women. Damn dey ain’t like no White girls wit der Black dudes. Dats a real problem out der in da Black ‘hoods.

K: What is different about the way White and Black people from other communities think about you?

M: Damn dats a loaded question. I mean most a da time I neva agree wit dah way White folks handle dey business, but I tink dey accept me mo den da Black community. Like White people hate on each otha prolly mo den any otha race cuz ya know you got yo levels of White. If you ah bougie ass cracka you ain’t gone be cool wit a sista like me. Like you feel like you’s betta den me anyway cuz you gots money and all dat so you ain’t bout ta care ‘bout who I’s datin ya know. Rich White bitches in a class all dey own so dey expect me tah do crazy shit like live in da ‘hood and dress and act different. Like dat whole White trash thing ya know. I ain’t trash, but dats how dey see it. Most of da time I ain’t lookin ta travel outside mah lines cuz you gotta know what you ‘bout tah get when you do dat. I ain’t got time fo dat bullshit so if some White bitch be doggin’ me I’s bout tah come out da box on her ass. Now dat I have mah son I can’t be doin da same things as be fo. Mah grandma told me long time ago dat I need ta hang wit mah kind and do what da Bible says and shit, but I’s wit my kind. Like she be thinkin’ dudes who of ah different race be lookin’ ta get at White girls just ta say dey did, like ah tally mark ya know. Her and mah dad be actin’ like ders tons of little White kids runnin’ round here wit religion and shit, but dat ain’t happenin.

K: What about the Black community? How do they see you?

M: Girl dos Black dudes be lovin some White girls wit big booties. Like dey don’t care ‘bout da whole White thing, if dey like what dey see dey ‘bout tah get it at. Da Black women don’ like dat shit at all dough. Dey be lookin’ tah find you and beat yo ass. Dey
don’t play like dat. Specially olda Balck women, dey ain’t havin it. Back in da day when I waz with mah man fo only a mont or so dis Black girl waz all in mah shit lookin ta talk trash ta me and follow me home and talk trash ta mah dad and shit. She be spreadin rumors like he all up in her business and crashin at her pad and shit, but it neva waz true. Dey be callin’ me names and shit at scoo and ya know at Cordova der ain’t tons of White bitches ova der. Like why da hell dees bitches be so interested in wad I be doing? So Tawanza yah know she join her friends and dey talk mo’ shit about me and how my man be out wit dem all night and shit. I ain’t neva cared ‘bout that cuz I developed a thick ass skin. Like what I been through would haf killed da average person. Where I come from when you ain’t got no one and nothin you still gotta get yo ass up off the pavement and get it done. Da struggle got real afta mah mom died and I ain’t gave a shit ‘bout no one afta dat. So all dem bitches who be doggin’ me ain’t nothing. I be like yah I see you swingin’ bitch, but I be dodging dem blows boo. You ain’t hittin’ nothin’ but dah air, dats it dats all.

K: Were his friends like that in the beginning as well? How did they feel about you and Carlos being together?

M: Dey just be like oh well you guyz ain’t goin last and be careful ya know she White. Dey neva waz really mean ta me dough cuz if dey waz like my man woulda come down hard on dem so it waz neva a big thang. Like in mah crew I alwayz had Carlos as dah backbone so what he said waz what went down and nobody neva waz gonna say shit. I was ‘bout 15 when I started hangin wit Carlos and his crew and den yah know da language sorta took ova. Da type ah dress and stuff neva changed dough cuz when you grow up in da ‘hood you already got dat style. Like I waz wearin Jordans and skinny jeans startin ‘bout 8 years old. Da make up and da accessorizin came a bit lata, but da language is da biggest change dat I went through.

K: How do you feel the White and Black people in your community feel about the way you adopted the language and culture?

M: I mean like I said it ain’t like I waz wearin White girl clothes and den went out and got mo stylish shit I had dat part ah me already. When you is young you be wearin what da otha kidz be wearin so we all were dah same wit da clothes. But da language waz a bit different cuz mah dad a racist so he ain’t neva let me have friendz ova dat weren’t White. So I picked up on da wordz and ova time dey became natural. Da White people ‘round here neva gave two shits about me speakin or dressin different cuz we all do da same thang. It waz normal fo us yah know. Da Black dudes had dat stereotype like oh dis White girl ain’t know nothing ‘bout cookin or cleanin, she gots it easy, she ain’t know what struggle is ya know da normal shit people say ‘bout White girls. Dey don’t know mah situation, but dey judged me on mah skin colah. I get hella mad ‘bout dis shit sometimes cuz it ain’t fair. Like I go try and cash mah check at dah liquor store and da
Black dude say he ain’t gonna cash it fo’ me cuz don’t do dat. Den my Black friend go in and he gets his shit cashed right away. Dey ain’t tryin ta do favors fo’ a White girl. At dah end ah da day it don’ matta how much language you know, how good you know da culture, if you gotta mixed son, it don matta. You still White at da end ah da day

K: Is it the same for your White and Black friends? How do they feel about your use of the language?

M: If dey mah friends dey betta be cool wit it or I ain’t hangin ‘round dem no mo. Da group dat I roll wit is cool wit everybody. Like if you ain’t cool wit someone you out cuz we got tah stick together. Fo people who I kinda know, but don’t really kick it with dey just take me fo’ what I is. Like some ah da moms at Jesse’s sco don’t know nothin’ bout me so dey just assume dats normal fo’ me. Outside ah dah circle people prolly assume I be wit a Black dude so dey see da similarities. I gotta mixed son too, so dey know dat I ain’t playin. In da beginning dough people waz afraid ta let me inside da circle, but if you wid someone who already in den you pretty much in to if you’s ah female.

K: Is it easier for a female to be considered than a male?

M: Yah definitely. Like females don’t do dat initiation stuff in da same way guyz do. Like some females have to sleep wid multiple dudes or whatever, but I ain’t been doin that. If you’s wid a dude already den he ain’t goin let dat happen. But fo like a normal female or dude jus walkin’ ‘round da streets it ain’t likely dey be accepted. Like if you blend in wid da rest of us den maybe, but most da time you gotta know someone. Like if I waz walkin ‘round real clean cut and preppy den people know somethin’ up. If you don’t blend in ‘round here den you’s ‘bout to attract attention and it ain’t a good thang.

K: Does belonging to a certain group or circle of friends contribute to being labeled authentic or inauthentic?

M: Depends on whad you talkin’ bout. If you’s in a gang den yah cuz once you’s in you get dat rep. It ain’t like you hafta talk slang or whateva, but you pick up da lingo once you’s in. It mo ‘bout respect fo yo brothas and sistas. Once you got dat bond it unbreakable. But if you ain’t in a gang, but still speak da lingo den you’s still cool, but nobody goin trust you. Like down here most ah dah young kids be joinin’ some type ah gang cuz you know it’s ah family. You ain’t neva had nothin’ but now you do and everyone ‘round here feel da same way. If you say you ain’t affiliated wid no one or no group den you’s probably a damn liar. We ain’t be trustin’ people like dat. But once you in den you got respect and dats golden ‘round here. You know you always got 15 or 20 brothas and sistas who gotcho back. Same goes fo’ people who move inta da area from otha cities. Like in otha cities dey do things different and dat don’t mean you’s gonna fit in here. I feel bad fo’ like da new kids cuz probably you’s cool, but we don’t know where
you’s from and you could be from a different group or be a threat to us so we ain’t bout ta let you in. It take a while ta prove yoself.

K: When you first started hanging out with Carlos did his immediate group of friends contribute to you learning the language and adopting the culture?

M: Da language fo sho, but da culture nah. Da culture is somethin’ I grew up wid cuz ders certain things dat we do ‘round here dat ar unique ta us in Rancho. I neva had no preppy White girl clothes or dat straight edge look yah know. Nobody do dat ‘round here so it weren’t no change once I started kickin’ it wid Carlos. Maybe like da food and stuff yah or like mah make-up but dats about it. Dah language is somethin’ you gonna pick up on once you’s wit a new crew. I pick up on da lingo befo’ dat, but mah dad ain’t goin’ to let me talk dat way or act dat way. He ain’t know English real good, but he know enough ta get pissed if I ain’t talkin’ right. He tried ta make me learn da language like Ukranian and hang ‘round people from dat country, but I ain’t interested in dat. He had a good friend dat he wanted me ta marry you know like ah arranged marriage, but I ain’t havin’ dat. He got hella pissed and he told me ta get mah shit and get dah fuck up out his house and I waz like cool. I ain’t neva been back. So afta dat I waz livin’ wid Carlos and I picked up da lingo real quick.

K: Do you think being able to speak the language helps you become more socially acceptable?

M: Nah cuz I waz wid Carlos so it ain’t goin matta if people ain’t wanna except me cuz I’s White or I don’t know da lingo as good as some otha bitches I waz in just cuz ah dat. Tah be excepted and trusted in dis neighborhood you got blend and wid blendin means talk da talk and walk da walk and everybody know dat. Ders some kids yah know dat be goin’ tah scoo and lookin’ tah go tah college you know, but once dey outta school dey switch dat lingo real quick. Lotsa Black kids know how tah speak right in scoo, but ain’t know way dey take dat talk out here on da streets. You tryin’ tah blend and you ain’t goin blend speakin’ propa scoo English der ain’t know way. So yah you fit in betta if you talkin’ da lingo even if you ain’t affiliated yah know.

K: So, overall based on your experience, how do you feel society perceives individuals who adopt a language and culture of a different race?

M: It don’ matter wad da language or culture you is or haz if you’s White nobody goin’ want yah as part of der world. Like in Black Culture dey don’ want no Whites up in der world and it don’ matta if you know da lingo or have respect fo dah culture dey ain’t neva goin wantchu. I hope fo dah sake of mah son dat dat shit goin’ be easier fa him den it waz for me. Like he mixed so he look like he fit in betta, but dat don’ mean he goin be accepted. Even fo dah light skinned Black kids out here dey strugglin’ as well. Dey may
haf two Black parents, but it don’ matta you still look like you ain’t belong. Black people
dey like dat, dah darker you is den dah mo’ you’s accepted. I kinda know now dah shit
my son gon’ go through so I’s ready fo it. I tink dat da Black community would ratha
have Asians or Latinos speakin’ dey language den Whites. Anybody but dah Whites. It
true fah dah otha races also. If you be speakin’ Spanish dah Mexican dudes be like what
da fuck? Dey haf dat word gringo fah a reason. Dey don’ want no White bitch speakin’
dey language nietha. You know dah world is like dat, don’ matta how much shit you done
been through or how po’ you is, if you’s White den you best be prepared fo’ dat shit.
Whites even fight against each otha fo’ dat status. In da White community der ain’t no
loyalty nietha. You watch how Black people introduce demsleves ta each otha. Like hey
brotha whad up? Dey ain’t even know each otha, but dey got dat race loyalty. Like you
look at dem people in Missouri right, some ah dem bitches knows dat the kid ain’t no
angel and he don’ punked dah shit outta dat little Chinese dude at da liquor stow, but dey
don’t care. Who knows da real story, but most ah dem Black people don’ care. All dey
care ‘bout is da fact dat he Black and da White cop shot hiz ass. Dey ain’t havin’ dat. But
if dat a White dude dat got popped by a Black cop den all da White people be sayin’ well
da fucka prolly deserved it. Ain’t know loyalty to da White race, none. So no matta whad
language you wanna learn or how you wanna act ain’t nobody neva goin’ be happy wid a
White female or dude reppin’ dey shit. No Black, Asian, Latino, Arab whateva dey ain’t
havin’ it. Prolly dat question good fo’ like a Mexican you know dat live down here cuz he
prolly have a betta answa like mo’ specific, but fo’ me it don’ matta. Society don’ like
Whites tah act like anythin’ otha then whad we is. Privileged motha fuckas dat ain’t know
whad struggle is. Tons of colahed people not even just Black but all dah colahs dey tink
dat just cuz ah dey race dat automatically means dey been strugglin.’ I be seein’ hella
Black people wid nice ass cars and houses and shit and dey ain’t neva struggled a day in
dey lives. Yo people may haf struggled no doubt, but you personally ain’t neva been
trough ah damn thing. You ain’t neva had to go wifout food or wifout clothes or wifout
education. Tah say yah know struggle just cuz ah your colah is some bullshit, struggle
come in every damn race and every size yo. Ova da yearz of hearin’ all dat bull ‘bout
Whites ain’t no whad struggle is I ain’t got no tolerance fo’ it. If I hears any person don’
matta White, Black, Latino whateva and dey sayz I don’ know whad struggle is cuz I’s
White I goin’ knock dat motha fucka out fo’ real. Come at me wid dat bullshit and you
goin’ find out all ‘bout me and how I deals whid struggle.

Running time: 55 minutes
Interview #2

M: Man dis some bullshit I always be dealing wit some shit. I bout ta hit a bitch

K: What happened?

Tati: I been checkin out dese apartments ova on da east side and da bitch owna ova der says I gots ta have a 600 credit sco ta rent der shit ass rooms

K: Do you have a 600 credit score? I thought you didn’t use credit cards

M: Fuck no I ain’t got no damn credit card and I ain’t got no 600. If you look at dah bitches who lives ova there ain’t none ah dem got a 600. Dat owner ah ho and she be lookin’ fo some extra shit and she know I ain’t gon give it ta her

K: What extra shit is she looking for?

M: Haha what she ain’t lookin fah. See you ain’t know what goes down ‘round dese places. Ya know when you drive by a ghetto ass neighborhood and you be like oh shit I gotta get da fuck outta here, dats what dis place is. Da bitch in charge runs dah show and she done been rentin rooms tah drug dealers and bangahs. She be gettin a cut ah dah drug money o she be usin her damn self I on’t know, but she ain’t lookin’ tah rent rooms tah just anyone. You gotta have da in o you ain’t gettin in. What she ain’t know iz dat you can’t put wrappin’ on shit and call it ah gift. She ain’t foolin’ no one.

K: How do you get the in? Are these those apartments on Howe and Bell?

M: Yah dose ugly ass rooms wit dah red doors. You only get dah in if she know who you is o you got someone who been livin der fo years. It don’ help nietha that I’s White cuz ain’t nobody trust Whites. Dah bitch owner is White, but she gotta accent so I on’t know where da fuck she come from. She actin like she done been in dah US all her damn life and she can say shit tah me. She fittin’ tah get an ass whoopin.’

K: So you think she won’t rent to you because you are White?

M: Hell yah it cuz a dat. Blacks dudes o cholas rollin’ up in der askin fo a room and she be all ova dat, but a White bitch roll up and she havin’ it. Like she know whateva shit goin’ down in her ‘hood she gots ta protect. She can’t be havin’ new people roll up and findin’ out she be doin’ dirt. She see mah face and she be thinkin’ White equal trouble. I know some dudes ova der and dey use and dey always be drivin’ through pickin’ up dey gear. She be runnin’ a drug ring o somethin.’
K: So why do you want to live there if that’s what you think she is doing?

M: I done been lookin’ for cribs ova der and I waz just checkin’ it out. I ain’t happy when dese ghetto ass apartment managers be makin’ up lies sayin’ I need a damn 600 credit sco tah get ah room. Not a goddamn person on dat block got ah 600. If you ain’t wantin’ new people tah check yo place out den say it and I be gone, but don’t be makin’ up lies like I’s a dumb bitch.

K: What does that have to be with you being White though?

M: Iz like I done told you last time, ain’t no pride in dah White race. Like dat bitch is White and ain’t tryin’ ta help out anotha White bitch like she should cuz she thinkin’ she betta den me. She been lookin’ at me through dah window and she thought I ain’t want dis White bitch wit tattoos up in mah business she prolly be tight wit dah cops so I’s gotta get her outta here.

K: What do you mean when you say White’s don’t have race pride?

M: Like dey ain’t got no love for people who’s dah same cola az dem

K: Do you feel other racial groups demonstrate that sort of pride towards each other or is it more of a social class hierarchy?

M: Whatchu mean social class hierarchy? Like who gots money and all ah dat

K: Yah like certain classes of people feel more comfortable with people who are like them, regardless of race.

M: Aw ok I gotchu. Like you’s talkin ‘bout social classes and shit like dose people on da Titanic who die cuz dey in da bottom ah dah ship cuz dey ain’t got no money. Like bougie people be cool wit otha bougie people even if dey ain’t dah same cola. I mean I guess dat could be true, but it ain’t like dat alwayz. Like if you gotta bougie White dude and a bougie Black dude hangin tagetha dey may be thinkin’ like oh we cool, but it neva gon’ be dah same as two bougie Black dudes chillin.’ Like certain shit ain’t understood by membas who ain’t ah dah same race. In dis ‘hood people from dah outside be thinkin’ we ain’t got money which ain’t true, but I roll wit dat stereotype. So you take all ah da po bitches ‘round her and dey all go tah rent ah apartment up in Folsom. Now dah owner ah da apartment he ah middle class Black dude aight, he see dah dudes walkin’ up and dey askin’ tah check out some rooms. He sees ah group ah poor ass Black dudes and he gon’ show ‘em some rooms cuz deys got dat race shit in common. You gots a middle class Black dude thinkin’ like dese dudes be lookin’ poor, but deys probably strugglin’ so I’s gon’ help em out. Den yah got me tryin’ tah get a room at a place dats run by ah White
bitch. See be lookin’ at me and be thinkin’ hell no I ain’t lettin’ dis po’ bitch up in my place. She a middle class bitch and she be lookin’ at my po’ ass and she ain’t care if we’s bof White, she be lookin’ tah hate.

K: That’s an interesting scenario

M: I know whatchu’s thinkin’ like dat ain’t true but it is. You be thinkin’ it about da class ah dah person and how much money you got but dat only true in da White race. Like my homie down dah street be a piece of Black trash and he went up to dah McDonald’s off ah Hazel tah ask fo’ a job. He ain’t gone to dah one ova here on Folsom Blvd. He done went up tah dat bougie ass Gold River city. Da higha you climb outta Rancho da mo’ bougie yah get. Anyway dis nigga went up ova der and he look ‘hood he talk ‘hood and he be askin’ fo ah job. Dah manager ova der is a big ol’ middle class Black dude and he still done gave mah friend ah job. Now I be talkin’ and lookin’ dah same az dat fool, but ain’t no one tryin’ tah give me ah job. Whatcu think happen if I roll up der and be askin’ fo a job talkin’ and lookin’ ‘hood like dis dude. Dah bitch be tellin’ me some shit like ah nah we ain’t got no openings here o you ain’t qualified tah flip dah fries. Ova der in Gold River ders hella White people too and dey still ain’t wanna hire me. A Black manager don’ want it and ah White manager nietha. Dat dumb ass gotta job cuz he dah same cola as dah dude dat hira him. Dey’s from different worlds, but he still got dah job. He got money o enough money and my friend ain’t got shit, but he still willin’ tah help da brotha out. Dat ain’t neva goin’ happen wit me and ah White manager even in da ‘hood. I know in dah scoo dey be tellin’ you like it ain’t about race, but dat all it about. When you walk dah walk and talk dah talk like me dat all it all ‘bout race. I be lookin’ and soundin’ dah same as all dah brothas and sistas out here, but deys goin’ be betta off den me cuz ah middle class o bougie ass Black person goin’ take a chance on ah po’ ass Black dude. Ain’t no White person gon’ do dat fo’ me.

K: When you say walk the walk and talk the talk what are you referring to?

M: Like play da role. If you be fo’ real down here you gotta know how ta act, talk, dress, all ah dat. Fo’ me it waz all ova dah dey I met Carlos cuz I learned dah lingo an dah steps. I ain’t even know what waz outside Rancho ya know. I ain’t know dah world waz dis fucked up, but it is. Like bein’ White it like a callin’ card fo’ hate. Otha Whites hear dah way ah talk and dey be thinkin’ like damn dis White trash and den you got da otha side wit dah Blacks and dey be like who da fuck you think you is talkin’ like us. Carlos ain’t neva gonna understand cuz he ain’t White. Even if he ain’t hatin’ like da othas he ain’t undastand der be othas hatin.’

K: You were really young though when you two met. What do you think your life would have been like if you hadn’t met him?
M: Shit I ain’t even know. Maybe I woulda done some cool shit. Like be ah doctor o somethin. I been thinkin’ ‘bout dat shit lately. Last week waz dah 15th anniversary ah mah mom’s death. She ain’t been here fo 15 years, shit dats a long time. Mah step dad prolly ain’t even remember. He ah lil bitch. He ain’t neva deserve tah have mah mom, like he ain’t done shit in his life. He ain’t neva been happy wit me o whad I be doin’, but he ain’t no damn role model. He ain’t neva learned no damn English, he lazy as fuck, an he racist as fuck. He ain’t no one tah tell me shit.

K: Did you choose to date guys that you knew your step dad wouldn’t like?

M: Nah I neva waz inta White dudes cuz ain’t too many ‘round here, but if my step dad wadn’t happy wit a dude den I’s ‘bout tah pursue dat dude mo.’ Mah step dad a real dumbass he be ‘spectin’ me tah date some square ass White dude even do’ der ain’t no White dudes ‘round here. If he gave ah shit ‘bout me o my life he woulda looked afta me afta she died. He woulda made sure I’s in scoo and doin’ shit right. Befo she died like I believed one day I could go tah college and be somethin.’ But if you ain’t got no support ain’t nothing good goin’ happen. Like dese kids out der on da streets dey ain’t got no one at home tah make sure deys doin’ shit right. I feel fo’ dem and dey struggles cuz I waz dem 15 year ago. Mah son ain’t neva goin’ know what dat shit like. He goin’ have support and someone tah show him da right way. I ain’t perfect, but I do what I need tah do fo him.

K: How did your life change after she died? I know you said you did not change a lot after she died, but it seems like you might have based on what you are saying.

M: I alwayz hated mah step dad and it ain’t changed afta she died. I hated him mo. I hate him now. I neva speak tah him and if Natty didn’t take Jesse tah see him I ain’t even know o give ah shit if he dead o alive. Mah life waz different back in dah day. Like mah mom waz everything tah me. She had so much love fah me and wanted dah best things in dis world fah me. I waz happy I had goalz in dis life, I felt like I could be somethin’ big an make money tah give her nice things dat she ain’t neva had. When she die I lost dat feelin’ of love and compassion, I had nothin.’ Afta dat Carlos came ‘round and showed me ah new life and dat feelin’ of hope came back tah me. Like I felt dat he filled dat hole inside me an once dat happen I ain’t neva looked back.

K: So is that when you adopted the language and made that transformation?

M: If dats whatchu gon’ call it. I done heard dah language way befo I spoke it cuz all dah kids be speakin’ it. I ain’t neva spoke dah lingo dough at home cuz my mom ain’t like it. She like propa English and all dat shit ya know. When I waz hangin’ wit Carlos dah language waz ah attractive thing tah me cuz it waz our way tah be different den dah othas. I ain’t know it waz ah second language o some shit it waz just some coo shit. But
den I waz hangin’ ‘round dah crew mo and mo and it became who I is. When you got a crew ah people actin’ an talkin’ a certain way you fittin’ tah change. I ain’t even know exactly when it happen, but der waz a certain point dat I just got wit it. Even some ah dah dudes in mah crew ain’t speak like me and dey be wonderin’ why I ain’t talk propa afta Carlos got locked up, but I done been through that propa shit it ain’t who I is. I ain’t got no problems wit it, it’s errbody else dat give me shit for it. At 13 you ain’t know what da world like, I neva coulda known dat bein’ White meant you gotta do shit ah certain way.

K: Why do you think being White means you need to do things differently?

M: Cuz ain’t nobody want a White girl talkin’ and actin’ like me. You know how it iz. Like growin’ up errbody got ah image in dah minds ah what a White girl should do. Dah shit dey should wear and dah way day gotta talk n all dat shit. Back in dah day my sista could braid mah hair up real nice and it look poppin.’ At scoo all dah Black bitches be sayin’ we ain’t shit jus some po’ trash tryin’ be wit it. Dey don’ see da lingo da culture none ah dat shit, dey see dah cola ah mah face. Dey ain’t see I be jus like dem and I done been in dis ‘hood for mah whole damn life. Like in dah ‘hood dat you be in da people get tah know yah and know you’s fa real, but if a nigga don’ know yah he see yo damn face and be thinkin’ fuck dis White bitch walkin’ up in here wit her damn corn rows she ain’t nothin.’ Dey gots a visual in dey minds ah whad a White bitch suppode dah be an it ain’t me.

K: But your language and the way you carry yourself woud make a lot of people think that you are Black. You are not Black, but you have put yourself in sort of an archetype of a Black woman.

M: Whad dat mean?

K: It means you have adopted the language and culture so well that many people without seeing your face would never be able to tell that you are not Black. Someone might hear you on the phone and they would think you are Black.

M: Oh fo’ show. I went tah do mah taxes wit dis new guy and we done been talkin’ on the phone fo ah appointment n when I walk in his office hiz eyes get all big like dey ‘bout tah pop out his damn head. He ah brotha, but he ain’t sound like it. I guess he done been thinkin’ I suppose tah be Black o some shit cuz I be speakin’ dah lingo. But all dat shit don’ matta. Like you may haf all dat shit da clothes an da lingo, but fo Black people who ain’t know you dey neva gon cept you. It all ova when dey see your face cuz don’ matta how simila you is, you can’t neva change yo skin colah. Black people ain’t neva wanna see no White bitch speakin’ dey lingo, wearin’ dey style, datin’ dey men. I be speakin’ betta den half dah niggas I know an dey always gon be mo’ accepted den me in new communities cuz dey got da visual. Black ass skin. Dat dah numba one thing you’s gotta have tah be automatically accepted by Black people. Like a Black dude who be speakin’
propa yah no like professional an shit he haf a betta chance of walkin’ up in Lincoln Village and bein’ safe den someone like me. Like he a hundred fuckin’ miles away from eva bein’ able tah speak dah language good and adopt dat certain style, but dats what Black people do. Dey got dat race pride and dah niggas where you live and dah niggas down here are so fuckin’ different, but dey be cool wit one anotha more den wit someone like me. It ain’t natural speakin’ dah lingo az a White bitch an dey ain’t wan’ it. Yah I could pass fo’ a Black woman, but once dey see mah cola it al ova. I may be Black as Black can be, but it ain’t mean nothin’ without dah visual. I do Black betta den some Blacks do Black, but ain’t mean nothin’ in dey eyez. I’s White an dat ain’t neva goin’ be good enough, simple az dat. It ain’t no act fah me eitha, but dey ain’t neva goin’ understand.

K: So you understand the difference between the language you speak and mainstream English? In professional terms you call it African American English and Mainstream English.

M: Dats some stupid shit cuz I done seen tons ah people speakin’ mah lingo and dey ain’t Black, but yah I know what you’s sayin.’ I knows how tah write dat shit, but I ain’t need tah eva. Like I ain’t writin’ no novels or no fuckin’ blogs ova here so why I need tah write. Like I memba in scoo’ like when I waz 14 o 15 like dah Spanish teacha he be sayin’ it one thang tah speak dah language, but it anotha tah write da shit. Cuz tons ah little Mexican kids ain’t know how tah write dey language, but deh can speak it. It sorta like dat wit me cuz I ain’t neva learn how tah write any otha way den when I waz in scoo’ Like dah lil’ Black kids on dah street dey ain’t neva learn how tah write Black so dey write White cuz dats whad dey done learned in scoo.’ I ain’t neva goin’ try tah speak different den whad I be doin’ but I ain’t know no otha way ta write. Like dah way I be speakin’ ain’t something dat can be written. N ain’t no Black speaka who can do it nietha. You gots some dumbasses who ain’t write at all, but none dat be speakin’ and writin’ Black. But I knows dah difference hell yah and most Black kids dey grow up knowin’ da difference. Jesse be speakin’ like me in da classroom and dose teachas be correctin’ him left and right. He know da way tah speak propa, an he know now dat dah lingo he done been learnin’ his whole life be different den da normal. Same goes fo all da lil Black kids in dah scoo.’ Fo’ me I been speakin’ dah lingo for mo’ den 10 yearz an’ I has tah try real hard tah talk propa. I ain’t have no interest in speakin’ propa so I ain’t give a fuck when I be hearin’ dat people don’ like da way I speak. I ain’t ‘bout tah go back an fo’th cuz ain’t no reason tah. Dah people ‘round here know how I do and we’s all cool. I ain’t give ah fuck whad dah rest ah da world think cuz I is whad I is. You ain’t like it den… (holds up middle finger).

K: When you started speaking African American English did you go back and forth between African American English and Mainstream English? You probably had to because your step dad wouldn’t have liked you speaking African American English.
M: Nah my step dad ain’t neva had time tah haf long convasations wid me. Like I waz 13 when mah mom die and bah 15 he had ah new wife. He ain’t spend a long time grievin’ yah know. Afta she die I met Carlos an he took me outta dah house. Nobody care like where I waz and I stay out all damn night sometimes and ain’t nobody askin’ where I waz. My step dad be out lookin’ fo women an if he wadn’t doin’ dat he done been wit Natty. All dah attention waz givin’ tah Natty an he ain’t hafta put up wit me no mo’ cuz I ain’t hiz kid. If he don’ care where dah fuck I waz or what I be doin’ why he care how I talk? He ain’t neva knew. Even afta he kicked me out dah house he ain’t neva ask like where I be o is I ok. Nah none ah dat. He ain’t nothin’ but a busted ass motha fucka who nonchalant as hell and ain’t give a damn ‘bout nothin’ o no one. I been thinkin’ ‘bout dat shit lately I knows dat if mah mom waz still alive probably I be one ah dem White girlz errbody want me tah be. I knows if she waz alive my ass woulda been home afta school doin’ work o doin’ chores o some shit. I neva woulda been stayin’ out all night and messin’ wit dudes at dat age. I ain’t ashamed of who I is, but I wonda some times like if she woulda been upset wit me. Like if she woulda ‘spected me tah be mo’ den whad I is. I feel bad dat Jesse ain’t neva goin’ know her cuz she a good person and really care ‘bout people. Hell if she waz ‘round today me an Natty both be different. Maybe Natty coulda gone tah college o met some nice dude. She worse off den me now cuz she ain’t got dah confidence dat I got. She quiet ah hell an she put up wit a lotta dudes dat be abusin’ her an shit. She needed ah good dad tah look afta her an show her how dudes should be treatin’ her. She got it worse den me cuz my chump ass step dad gotta new bitch and done had two lil girls and Natty waz pushed out. Like step mom be worse den step dads prolly cuz she ain’t give nothin’ tah Natty. She be buyin’ shit fo her two kidz an she ain’t doin’ nothin’ for Natty. I whoop both ah der asses fo’ whad dey did tah her cuz she just be acceptin’ bullshit n her life now days. She ain’t wanna do shit an she let dudes beat on her an I ain’t havin’ it.

K: When you look back on your life before your mom died what was it like? Do you remember before you adopted AAE and became introduced into the culture?

M: I memba errday I went tah schoo’ an I had tah be home when doez damn street lights waz on. Mah mom don’ play like she fittin’ tah get real pissed if I ain’t followin’ her rules. Like she from Poland and ova der yah know education a big deal an I had tah be studyin’ afta schoo’ not outside runnin’ ‘round. Some ah dah people I know ‘round here I knows from schoo’ long ago, but I neva chill wit anyone ‘cept Natty and Gabby. Gabby mom done been tight wit mah mom fo’ years so we could chill together, but she don’ let me run ‘round dah streets wit no one. Like mah stepdad he a dumbass fah thinkin’ da place we done lived fo’ years ain’t ghetto az hell and dat people livin’ ‘round here is White like me an Natty. Mah mom waz smart she knew da area waz ghetto dat why she ain’t let me run ‘round wit jus anyone. Because ah dat I knew some shit I got dat honor
roll and that excellent award for doing shit in the community. I wasn't aware that model
White girl rolling down here in the 'hood. She didn't let me make my own choices so
I didn't know about gangs or different languages or any of that shit. After she died
my stepdad didn't give a fuck and I became my own boss at 13. I didn't experience
much at that time so I hit the streets hard. Like tried drinking and doing drugs and all that was
different than what I knew. My homie down the street had his house to himself cuz his mom's
had been working night shifts. We'd be there every night drinking and smoking.
So one night I knew it was all over. My life before was over. When she died my
White side died too.

K: So you are saying that before you adopted the language and culture your life was
different. I think that is the first time you have ever said that

M: I only say that because my mom was looking down on me and she knew the truth and I didn't
be acting like she let me run the streets back in the day. She gave me all the shit she had for
me and Natty and it's not right to say that I always did. She gave me the language and all the stuff
she knew. I didn't like all the words and Philippinos round here just know language to sell drugs
or to pimp out women. I didn't say much about doing that, but I didn't know when my mom was here.
When I was with a White person, I didn't know how to speak it or become urban. It was all about
the influence around you.

K: What things changed after she died besides you sneaking out at night?

M: All that shit changed. I done been out all nights ah dah week, smokin', drinkin', ain't
doin' no school work, ain't lookin' after Natty. Dah been honest dough, dah kids at school
notice the difference in me and I think even at that young age that we was at dey 'cepted
me mo' after I learned the language and culture. Dah be thinkin' like aight she ain't dah stuck
up White bitch like we been thinkin'. Even den at 13 yearz old dem kids know dah
attitude dey 'posed tah haf fo' dah Whites. Dah be talkin' 'bout wiggas an' shit, but dey
ain't neva call me dat. One dey I axe dis kid why he ain't call me dat and he say T well
you ain't White. But I is White, but I guess people be thinkin' if you be actin' and
be speakin' dah language dat you ain't really White. I on't know.

Running time: 52 minutes
You are invited to participate in a research study which will be conducted by Kathryn Scheuring in the Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of the study is to explore a White speaker’s linguistic ability in African American English. The study will also analyze the White speaker’s perceptions of the adoption of African American English and Culture, racial identity, authenticity in the White and Black communities, and social stigma.

You were selected as a participant in this study because you meet the inclusion criteria required for participation in the study. The inclusion criteria includes; identifying as White and speaking African American English as your primary language.

Your responses to unstructured and structured interviews will be recorded and transcribed in a way that cannot be traced back to you by anyone that reads this study. Audio recording the interviews will allow for better analysis of the gathered data. Your participation in this study will also be kept confidential. However, the results of the study as a whole may be shared with the education community and become a matter of public record. Once the interviews have been recorded, they will be kept in a password-protected computer folder to be destroyed at a later date.

There will be no compensation for participation in this research, other than contributing to a better understanding of the complex dynamics between race, language, and culture. If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Kathryn Scheuring at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at xxxxxxxx.xxxxx@yahoo.com.

You may decline to be a participant in this study without any consequences. If there are any interview questions that you do not want to answer, you may decline to answer without any negative consequences. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

_______________________________                      ___________________
Signature  of Participant                                          Date
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Interview #1

1. When were you first aware of African American English being your primary language?

2. Do you remember when you first started noticing a difference in the way people treat you?

3. What contributed to your adoption of African American English?

4. Do you think you can go back and forth between the two languages? Between Standard Mainstream English and African American English?

5. Why do you identify AAE as your primary language?

6. Other than the language what other things do you need to have or be a part of to be considered legit or authentic?

7. What specifically though identifies you more closely with the culture?

8. Do you feel like the way you talk, and dress have any influence on the way members of the Black and White communities outside of Rancho think about you?

9. What is different about the way White and Black people from other communities think about you?

10. What about the Black community? How do they see you?

11. How do you feel the White and Black people in your community feel about the way you adopted the language and culture?

12. Is it the same for your White and Black friends? How do they feel about your use of the language?

13. Does belonging to a certain group or circle of friends contribute to being labeled authentic or inauthentic?
Interview #2

1. Do you feel other racial groups demonstrate that sort of pride towards each other or is it more of a social class hierarchy?

2. What do you think your life would have been like if you hadn’t met him (Carlos)?

3. How did your life change after she (her mother) died?

4. So is that when (after her mother’s death) you adopted the language and made that transformation?

5. Why do you think being White means you need to do things differently?

6. Your language and the way you carry yourself would make a lot of people think that you are Black. You are not Black; but you put yourself in an archetype of a Black woman correct?

7. Do you understand the difference between the language you speak and Standard English?

8. When you started speaking African American English did you go back and forth between African American English and Mainstream English?

9. When you look back on your life before your mom died what was it like?

10. Do you remember (your life) before you adopted AAE and became introduced into the culture?
REFERENCES


