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# The Influence of Early Childhood and Upbringing on Eminem's Music

## Slim Shady

Mim Udovich once said about Eminem, “There are millions who are just like him, who cuss like him... dress like him, walk, talk, and act like him, and based on his sales, feel like him. That is: they feel incredible anger.... But that these millions exist and that Eminem speaks for them, is probably what is both truly subversive and truly threatening about his success.” (qtd. in Mattern 33). Eminem is one of the most successful rappers of all time. His lyrics that inspire and bring controversy truly brought Mathers fame. Mathers created controversy with his lyrics that address topics such as politics and homophobia (“Eminem”). Eminem also defeated the stereotype of all African American hip-hop artists. Marshall Mathers has impacted music with his carefree attitude, meaningful songs, and dedication to hip-hop and he will continue to be influential for generations to come.

Eminem’s childhood was rough, inspired him to follow his dreams, and shaped him to become an influential American music artist. Mathers was born on October 17, 1972, in St. Joseph, Missouri. When Mathers was 2 years old his parents divorced (Mattern 15). His father, Marshall Bruce Mathers II, then walked out on Mathers and his mother (Lane 14) and moved to California (13). After this, Eminem’s mother began to use drugs, causing her to abuse and neglect her son (16). The two of them were constantly moving in and out of houses, schools, and cities, making it difficult for Mathers to have consistent friends (Mathers 141). Caused by his lack of stability and ability to make and keep friends, Eminem was bullied in school. One specific time Mathers was beaten and almost killed in school when he was nine years old (78). Mathers states about the situation, “My brain really was f—g bleeding out my ear. It wasn’t like I was in a coma, but I was kind of blacking out and waking up off and on for a couple of days. When I finally came out of it, my first words were, ‘I can spell elephant.’ I guess I felt like a Ringling Brother” (Mathers 78). Due to his father’s absence and being bullied Mathers developed self-esteem and anger management issues (Lane 19). As Mathers entered high school, he and his mother stopped moving around and he attended Lincoln High School in Detroit, Michigan. Mathers never succeeded in high school, failing the ninth grade three times and then dropping out (Mattern 17).

Eminem always lived in primarily African American areas growing up, which introduced him to black culture and music (Mattern 17), however Mathers’ real interest in hip-hop was started by his Uncle Ronnie’s introduction to the genre (18). His love for the music inspired him to begin

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writing and rapping songs himself. Mathers' biggest influences and favorite rappers were LL Cool J, Ice-T, the Beastie Boys, and the Fat Boys (Lane 17).

Mathers and his girlfriend at the time, Kimberly Scott, had a daughter named Hailie Jade Scott on December 25, 1995 (Lane 18). His daughter impacted his life greatly, showing up in the lyrics to his songs and encouraging him to work harder. In 1996, he and his girlfriend broke up and she denied Mathers the right to see his daughter, causing him to attempt suicide (Mattern 21). After his failed suicide attempt, he realized that he needed to continue to chase his dreams and make them a reality to support his family and be truly happy. Eminem's younger years were a struggle, but they also introduced him to rap music and influenced him to become the man he is today.

Many things contributed to Eminem's fame, including his dedication to music, his controversial and meaningful lyrics, and his crazy attitude. Eminem began following his dreams and trying to get into the industry of rap music by joining rap groups, entering competitions, and recording demo CDs. Mathers began his real hip-hop career as a battle MC at a small music store in Detroit called the Hip Hop Shop (Mattern 19). Eminem joined a rap group called "Soul Intent" with his best friend in 1995. The group divided, and Eminem and his friend broke off and formed another group called "D-12". "D-12" contained the MCs Eminem, Proof, Bizarre, Swift, Kon Artis, and Kuniva ("Biography: Eminem"). Mathers recorded music both alone, and with his group "D-12". In 1997, Eminem competed in the Rap Olympics in Los Angeles, California. He placed 2nd (Aretha 28) which he believes was done unfairly because he was white (29). After the competition, Mathers was recognized for his skills and introduced to hip-hop producer and artist, Dr. Dre (30). Dr. Dre was instantly blown away by Eminem's skill (32). They began recording together, and Mathers first studio album was released in 1999, called "The Slim Shady LP." That's when Mathers' fame took off. Mathers' states about his original song "My Name Is", "What if that song had never come out? Where would I be now?" (Mathers 58).

Mathers lyrics offended many and caused much controversy, contributing greatly to his popularity. The author's opinion: "Eminem's lyrics stood out from many other rap artists, as his raps are honest, graphic, and filled with memories from his rough childhood, his difficult relationships with his mother and wife, his drug use, and his love for his daughters" (Mattern 31-32). Eminem angered many gay and lesbian individuals with his anti-gay lyrics ("Eminem"), which were a consistent theme in many of his songs. Eminem rapped about drugs and substance abuse, which struck a chord with many teenagers that wanted to rebel. Also controversial, he included profanity and glorified violence against women (Mattern 10). In songs such as "Mosh" and "White America", Mathers criticised and threatened the president of the time, George W. Bush ("Biography: Eminem").

Mathers' unique upbringing, outrageous songs, and crazy alter-ego "Slim Shady" interested

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many people and influenced his popularity. In the author's opinion: "Eminem has a unique triple identity, comprising of real- life person Marshall Mathers, entertainer Eminem, and thug Slim Shady" ("Eminem"). His Slim Shady persona created many violent and homophobic songs, including "Kill You", "Who Knew", and "Fight Music". On one specific occurrence, Mathers' song "Kim", written about his fantasy to murder his ex-wife, drove Kim to attempt suicide ("Eminem"). Other songs of his are not as vulgar and disturbing, though. For example, "Lose Yourself" was a song written for his movie 8 Mile, and was the first rap song to win an Academy Award (Aretha 8). Eminem's second album, "Marshall Mathers LP", sold 2 million copies in the first 2 weeks making it one of the best selling rap albums of all time ("Biography: Eminem"). Due to the popularity of his second album, Mathers claimed that he couldn't leave his house without being mobbed (Mathers 59). Also contributing to his fame, Mathers starred in the successful film 8 Mile (101). The film was roughly inspired by his life, the plot being the struggles of a young aspiring rapper in Detroit. Mathers desire to be different and to be a controversial artist heavily contributed to his success.

Through his music, Eminem has created a new set of opportunities and sparked inspiration in many individuals who may have not seen success if not for Mathers' dedication. Eminem paved the way for many white rappers, as he was the first to be respected and treated equal to his African American peers. Mathers suffered much racism and discrimination on his journey to fame, but he began a trend as many white rappers followed closely after him (Lane 17). Many artists including Mac Miller and Macklemore have claimed to be inspired by Eminem and his contributions to music.

Eminem's collaborations with important artists from other genres popularized and softened rap, making it more desirable to a wider range of people. "Love the Way You Lie", a pop and rap collaboration, featured Rihanna, a popular singer from the pop genre. Also, his song "Stan" included British pop singer Dido, and the song became very popular for its interesting story and beautifully sung chorus ("Biography: Eminem"). In the film 8 Mile, Eminem's character, Jimmy Smith Jr, is shown to come from poverty and a rough childhood, yet he prevails a successful battle emcee. Inspired by the underdog-esque story, many battle rap groups formed shortly after the release of the movie, including King of the Dot, Don't Flop, and UW Battle League (Aretha 13).

Eminem is also a producer with his own record label, Shady Records, that branches off of Interscope Records. A few of the names he has signed and worked with are Skylar Grey, Slaughterhouse, and YelaWolf. Eminem has also created a Sirius radio station, Shade 45. Shade 45 has become a place that helps to expose the talents of upcoming artists and plays hip-hop music ("Biography: Eminem"). Without Mathers in the hip-hop industry, many artists may not have their places, and many people may not have had the inspiration that his story and struggle shows. His story will continue to inspire many people, not just rappers, to follow their

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dreams and try hard to achieve what they want to achieve. Eminem has left behind a legacy and a trail behind him that many can follow and find inspiration from.

Eminem's incredibly profane alter-ego known as Slim Shady, his lyrical story telling ability, his struggle through childhood, and his tendency to cause controversy have all caused him to be one of the most influential music artists of all time. He has done incredible things and inspired many. His contribution to the community of hip-hop, such as popularizing the genre, and paving the path for caucasian rappers everywhere, will never be forgotten. Being the first rap artist to win an Academy Award, he has definitely made history. Marshall Mathers is a man that has impacted the world of music and will continue to do so for many generations to come.

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