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The Sociolinguistic and Rhetorical Strategies of Beyoncé's
Lemonade

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The Language of *Lemonade*: The Sociolinguistic and Rhetorical Strategies of Beyoncé's *Lemonade*

Alexis McGee

The power of Queen Bey is an undeniable force with respect to what Gwendolyn Pough identifies as the Black public sphere (Pough 2004). According to Pough, the Black public sphere is crucial to understanding the intersectional identities of Black women:

Blacks historically navigated and negotiated the larger public sphere (and currently do so) by using what was available to them, namely, spectacle, representation, and the renegotiation of concepts such as the public/private split. In doing so, they helped to shape (and continue to shape) a Black public sphere that aims to evoke change in the larger public sphere. The change sought has taken a variety of forms throughout Black history in the United States. However, the consistent factors have always been collective struggles and the greater good for the Black community writ large. (Pough 2004, 33-34)

Questions of how Beyoncé navigates (Black) public spheres as a celebrity who explores her various personal and public identities arise when we ruminate on Pough's construction of the Black public sphere. This rise of Beyoncé as a mother, sister, daughter, unapologetically Black woman from the South who is also a worldwide performer and entrepreneur has shown us various sides of this Black woman music artist from Houston. Therefore, the public presence of *Lemonade* makes space available for Black women to evoke change and validate collective struggle and identity.

However, these navigations are often discussed in conversations addressing her avant-garde metamorphosis, her personal aesthetics, and her non-heteronormative religious practices

seen in *Lemonade*. They are broadly discussed as disaggregate identities of the same person, which limits the realities of her complex being. I posit that Beyoncé's navigation of the spectacle and representation of her intersectional identities in the public/private spheres is significantly and rhetorically demonstrated in her visual album, *Lemonade*. It is here that her rhetorical and sociolinguistic use of language and performance establish a complex Black woman identity cultivated in private/private spheres for personal and communal consumption. To do this, I first situate the conversation of *Lemonade* as a linguistic and rhetorical praxis. I define particular terminology to ground Beyoncé's practice of language as an important indicator of discursive communities. In this work, I primarily focus on the juxtaposition of two songs, "Hold Up" and "Daddy Lessons;" however, this analysis is not beholden only to these two songs. Then I frame the significance of language as a rhetorical method to better understand the navigation of intersectional identities, particularly for southern Black women. This analysis, more specifically, uses verbal and nonverbal gestures such as code-switching, indirection, silence, "g-dropping," and "r-lessness" to exemplify Beyoncé's navigation of identities between songs. Here, "nonverbal" is defined as part of human language but not recognized as a morpheme, or word. Rather nonverbal, as well as utterance (more precisely) is "a stretch of speech between two periods of silence or potential (perceived) silence" (Rowe and Levine 2015). Finally, I locate linguistic and rhetorical markers in *Lemonade* to provide real-world application and analysis of the manifestation recognized as intersectional identities. I argue that Beyoncé's use of African American Women's Language (AAWL) in *Lemonade* provides us with a rhetorical tool for re/addressing the intersectional workings of Black womanhood and provides us with a roadmap for discussing the ways in which she navigates her fluid and evolving identity that is accessible and explicit by design (Brooks 2018, 72-76). As such, this chapter highlights Beyoncé's use of

AAWL, which include both verbal and nonverbal rhetoric and linguistic features connected to AAWL, reflecting her construction of a Black feminist identity.

With this in mind, this work bridges academic and community spaces to remind us of and to celebrate the power and possibilities resonating within Black women. This chapter analyzes rhetorical cues and speech sounds performed and heard in this album. I understand Beyoncé's use of language as a functional, rhetorical style which allows the flexibility of identities that signify the incorporation of multiple discourse identities—namely Black, Southern, woman—as part of her production, navigation, and excavation of the self within public/private spheres. She blurs the boundaries between one specific identity and another, effectively constructing a conglomeration of identities specific to her¹. This marking of intersectional identities, by way of language, demonstrates an explicit connection with generational and communal practices creating, or rather, *conjuring* spaces for Black women's healing (Brooks, Martin, and Simmons forthcoming)—a method for enacting agency, activism, and self-care.

Defining Foundational Terms

To clarify the language used here, I ground my discussion more broadly in Geneva Smitherman's description of African American Language (AAL): “Black Dialect is an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America's linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression and life in America. Black Language is Euro-American speech with an Afro-American meaning, nuance, tone, and gesture. The Black idiom is used by 80 to 90 percent of American [B]lacks, at least some of the time” (Smitherman 1977, 2).

Smitherman continues, “Think of [B]lack speech as having two dimensions: language and style. . . Black English, then, is a language mixture, adapted to the conditions of slavery and

¹ See Tanisha Ford's chapter in this reader.

discrimination, a combination of language and style interwoven with and inextricable from Afro-American culture” (Smitherman 1977, 3). I incorporate Smitherman’s definition here because it provides us with a working foundation for understanding the context of Beyoncé’s rhetorical use of language, which expresses her navigation of intersectional identities in and between public/private spheres. The ways Beyoncé performs (i.e. “style”) the various songs in *Lemonade* announces her reconciliation with the same sociopolitical and historic context of language Smitherman asserts. For example, Beyoncé’s explicit inclusion of AAWL like code-switching, in/directness, and nonverbal sonic rhetorics—specifically “hush harbors” and silence—varies between songs. This navigation is most visible when one listens to the difference of style, or delivery and performance, in “Hold Up” and “Daddy Lessons,” two well-known, mainstream singles from the album. As rhetorical functions, these features show her explicit navigation of constructing agency through language.

Additionally, Sonja Lanehart notes that AAWL marks a more specific way of using language and rhetoric in a gendered construction as well as a sociocultural manifestation:

I have patterned my definition of AAWL to [Salikoko] Mufwene’s (2001) definition of AAL: AAWL is the language spoken by African American women As with Mufwene’s definition of AAL as the umbrella term for all varieties of speech by African Americans (including vernaculars, standard, and Gullah), AAWL includes the varieties of speech by African American women (vernaculars, standard, etc.). As such, to speak AAWL is to be an African American woman. (Lanehart 2009, 2)

With this in mind, Beyoncé’s use of AAWL positions her in multiple Black public discourses (e.g. Black, woman, and Southern) from which she draws to substantiate her intersectional identity in *Lemonade*.

AAWL encapsulates the central networkings of intersectional, rhetorical, and cultural identities performed in sonic spheres. For example, we hear Beyoncé forego her Southern drawl and regional terminology like “hot sauce in my bag,” in her song “Sandcastles,” for a performance that delivers a message through the use of Standard American English. This explicit code-switching positions Beyoncé in multiple spheres: attuned to Black Southern heritage (e.g. “Formation”) and assimilated to Standard American English practices and audiences in “Sandcastles.” As a collective audience we see her deliver multiple styles between songs that resonate with the politics and cultural atmosphere of New Orleans at one point and the larger general population in another. This agency through language describes her maneuvering of multiple identities, politics, and locations for our consumption and reflection. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1992) discusses a portion of these interrelated workings of identity reflected by language. She notes this “metalanguage of race,” for instance, is integral to understanding AAWL. Higginbotham states, “At the threshold of the twenty-first century, [B]lack women scholars continue to emphasize the inseparable unity of race and gender in their thought. They dismiss efforts to bifurcate the identity of [B]lack women (and indeed of all women) into discrete categories—as if culture, consciousness, and lived experience could at times constitute ‘woman’ isolated from the contexts of race, class, and sexuality” (Higginbotham 1992, 273). Therefore, AAWL not only includes the varieties of speech but also the ways in which Black women communicate culture, consciousness, lived experiences, processes of moment-creating, and/or conjuring feminist modes of being or healing (Brooks, Martin, and Simmons forthcoming).

Black women's rhetorical use of language, like Beyoncé's emphasis of instrumentation and silence in "Daddy Lessons," also reminds us of the intersectional complexities between verbal and nonverbal communication of Black women's language which is equally important for understanding AAWL as a method of rhetorical communication (Morgan 2002; 2004). In this line of thought, we begin to see the interrelatedness of language (in terms of sound and context) and the performance of meaning (in terms of interaction between non/verbal expression) as a method for Black women's delivery and navigation of multiple discourse communities—both public and private. Marcyliena Morgan asserts the generational and historical role of creating identity through narratives, which include laughter and hollers for example, are significant parts of AAWL. This could easily be said of Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and her connection to the South for many of her listeners, including myself. Morgan's insistence of sociocultural context within language aligns cultural politics with language, body politics, place, sonic rhetoric, and translation. Like Morgan, Beyoncé theorizes the performances of everyday Black women in *Lemonade*. "The daily lives of Chicago's Black women were wrapped in layers of contradictions, and they knew it. Yet they celebrated it. And they agonized over it too. Sometimes they buried their real fears and stories of discrimination in hilarious tales of adventure. At other times, the realities were revealed in retrospect—when one finally grasped in astonishment that what seemed out of place in a story was actually what was 'really' going on," Morgan states (Morgan 2004, 52). This is what is happening in *Lemonade*. The celebration of Black womanhood in the midst of oppressive politics we see globally and in the South in "Formation" comes after the acknowledgment of loss and pain performed in "Freedom" and its preceding interlude. These stories and realizations of various ways of knowing developed in connection with the use and delivery of language—the speaking of their (generational Black

women's) stories—and the recognition of the hidden performances and meanings of language within nonverbal communication.

Overview of Intersectionalities in the Language of *Lemonade*

This intersection of AAWL and public identities are reflected in Black women's music, making it useful as a generational method, one that Beyoncé utilizes. Like Morgan suggested with her ethnographic analysis of AAWL, Beyoncé's opening vocals of this album, a series of "huhs" and "voiced breaths," harkens back to early blues women², jazz singers, and Black women hip hop artists who also implement similar rhetorics, language practices, and stories with scatting and improvisation. "Voiced breath" here is recognized as an utterance. More specifically breathing with sound. Bruce Rowe and Diane Levine describe voice, in terms of phonetic description, as "The air exhaled from the lungs does not in itself produce speech sounds. To create such sounds, the flow of air must be altered into sound waves of varying qualities and characteristics." Furthermore, voiced sounds, in English, are often created in a sociocultural context (2015). Beyoncé sings: "You can taste the dishonesty/It's all over your breath as you pass it/off so cavalier/But even that's a test/Constantly aware of it all/My lonely ear pressed against the walls of your world" ("Pray You Catch Me"). Her combination of nonverbal sounds and oral storytelling of relationships in the beginning of *Lemonade*, for example, work together to nuance what Morgan (Morgan 2004, 51) suggested as "what is really going on." The expression of the spectacle and representation of selves are being conceived through AAWL. The pain, joy, companionship, the expression of intimacy are delivered as multileveled interactions between herself and (presumably) her heterosexual husband, but this reality also speaks to numerous types of relationships one person—Beyoncé or any Black (Southern) woman—may find herself

² See Brooks and Martin's chapter in this reader.

entwined with such as familial relationships and internal or communal relationships. The nonverbal, audible epigraph of voiced breaths provides a multidimensional reflection of not only her exhaustion and expended energy lost in the relationship but also deepens her social condition and consciousness expressing recognition of her reality.

More so, the rhetorical use of AAWL signifies a connection to Black women's discursive communities. It insists that Bey is more than a public pop-culture icon; she is also part of the audience, part citizen who is disproportionately misrecognized as other by a solipsistic nation. This rhetorical listening to her identities and communities builds coalition and agency through sound and language. As Morgan points out, "This [recognition or validation of self within community] is because in the African American speech community, hearers and audience members construct meaning and intention along with the speaker. The cultural logic requires that individuals be aware of the consequences of their words" (Morgan 2004, 54). Furthermore, "As an actor and observer, one's social stance and social face are defined as how others understand the speaker as part of a community of cultural and social actors" (Morgan 2004, 54). Therefore, one's selfhood is simultaneously constructed as a reflection of macro- and micro-community presences as well as an internalized reflection of the self as an individual with respect to multiple discourses. *Lemonade* acts as a discursive call and response formed with AAWL, and Beyoncé's linguistic and rhetorical use of language are manifestations of these intersectional identities.

Beyoncé asserts her reconciliation with fault, love, distance, fear, pain, pride, sexuality and loneliness all at once: feelings many of us are familiar with. The "huhs" and hollers intimately connect the magnitude of her realities and her emotional and physical involvement of coming to consciousness repeatedly. These recognitions of emotions and communities cannot always be expressed in words alone but are accompanied by moans, groans, foot stomps, hand

waves, sighs, and other nonverbal gestures. This is the sonic interlude representing her manifestation of dynamic, intersectional identities that are supported by the delivery and style of her lyrics.

Beyoncé's use of AAWL in *Lemonade* demonstrates her coalescing consciousness and provides examples of movement creating, making her use of language a rhetorical tool. By movement creating I am referring to what "A Black Feminist Statement" suggests as "the process of consciousness-raising, actually life-sharing, [hence,] we began to recognize the commonality of our experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression" (Combahee River Collective 2009, 4). In other words, upon analysis of Beyoncé's language in *Lemonade*, we see her use of AAWL reflect and open dialogues in public spaces—such as politics, news media, and community organizing—and private spaces like home captures a range of emotions, selfhoods, places, and political coalitions that in/form Black women's. With this in mind, I see both Beyoncé and her album *Lemonade* as a performance; it is an aural/oral/visual work, a collective ensemble and testimony of shared life experience that explicitly incorporates AAWL marking methods of change and resistance to binary or linear transformations of the self. It is a tool for movement-making and consciousness-raising.

Contextualizing Rhetorical Functions of AAWL Found in *Lemonade*

These spaces of sonic resonance, found in *Lemonade*, mark Black women's complexities through both indirect and direct practices. The smile portrayed in the video for "Hold Up," the scream heard in "Don't Hurt Yourself" tell of happiness and anger most explicitly. However, in other circles concerning Black women, for example, these acts also represent power, autonomy, and frustration or resolve indirectly. The recognition of these multiple meanings in both verbal

and nonverbal gestures are central to recognizing the complexities conveyed through AAWL. In “Conversational Signifying,” for example, Morgan suggests that queering indirectness—a method of conveying intention by means of hinting, circumlocution, insinuations and the like—such as laughter and silence have particular linguistic resonance for AAWL. These features “characterize dialect ambiguity and opposition between African American English (AAE) and American English,” and, as such, represent a way of communicating meaning, agency, support, and resistance to normative practices and/or policies that may be in opposition to the betterment of one’s self. In addition, “prosodic features such as loud talking, marking, pitch and timing/rhythm” as well as “interactional features such as eye gaze, parallelism and rights to a topic,” asserts Morgan, all suggest that verbal communication and nonverbal gestures instruct conversation, implying an engagement with one another to provide ways for Black women to subvert power structures and assert or validate experiences through developing and sustaining particular identities, individually and communally (Morgan 1996, 409). With this in mind, Beyoncé’s explicit inclusion of AAWL markers like codeswitching, signifying, and nonverbal sonic rhetorics—“hush harbors” or silence—shows her navigation of constructing intersectional identities. This process-creating is a rhetorical network of movement thoroughly connected to Black women’s communities and Black public/private spheres. The evolution of identity and consciousness within the public sphere, *Lemonade*, is particularly relevant in this movement of #BlackLivesMatter. Beyoncé gives us a tool to heal as Black women, individually and communally, as we continually face depreciation of our bodies. Simultaneously, she refuses to isolate the #BlackLivesMatter movement making this conversation of healing and self-love a communal address—one that challenges systemic and intersectional oppressions.

Additionally, I look to Regina Bradley's presentation at the "Lemonade Seminar." Bradley suggests that some of the starkest (and perhaps the most significantly audible) markers of meaning in Beyoncé's *Lemonade* are the silences. These aural/oral breaks highlight the tension and complementary workings of nonverbal and linguistic complexities that impact Southern, Black womanhood. I agree with Bradley that these silences are more than just pauses meant to draw listeners into the song. They signify a rhetorical maneuver of AAWL as a method of communicating multilayered meanings found within sonic resonances. This negotiation of silence and sound is explicit and rhetorical.

In a similar fashion, Vorris Nunley contextualizes this as an African American rhetorical tradition of what he identifies as "hush harbors." Nunley suggests that generations of Black authors, both men and women, have utilized silence in a rhetorical and metaphysical manner: "[Black rhetoricians] have demonstrated, diasporic Africans, women, and others have histories of developing raced and gendered distinctive interpretive communities to offset their exclusion from the public sphere" (Nunley 2011, 221-22). He continues to define the rhetorical use of "hush harbors" as "a rhetorical tradition constructed through Black public spheres with a distinctive relationship to spatiality (material and discursive), audience, African American *nomoi* (social conventions and beliefs that constitute a worldview or knowledge), and epistemology" (Nunley 2011, 222). Furthermore, Nunley states, "Hush harbor rhetoric is composed of the rhetorics and the commonplaces emerging from those rhetorics, articulating distinctive social epistemologies and subjectivities of African Americans and directed toward predominately Black audiences in formal and informal Black publics or African American-centered cultural geographies." He continues, "hush harbor places become Black spaces because African American *nomos* (social conventions and beliefs that constitute a worldview or knowledge),

rhetoric, phronesis (practical wisdom and intelligence) tropes, and commonplaces are normative in the encounters that occur in these locations” (Nunley 2011, 222). For *Lemonade* then, Beyoncé’s album not only re/creates individual and communal identities reflecting and connecting with Southern, Black womanhood, but the metaphysical spaces of her utterances also develop an intersectional Black feminist “hush harbor.” Her hollers, laughters, and silences, as Bradley pointed out, all renegotiate Black public/private spheres to explicitly include AAWL as a central rhetorical method.

Silence, verbal gestures, and the hush harbor discourse for example, are linguistic and rhetorical exercises especially important to Black women’s speech. Denise Troutman acknowledges the use of silence in Black women’s conversations as an extension of cooperative and collaborative speech. Troutman refers to Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis’ (1993) important work with oral narrative and Black women’s autobiography when she asserts “non-verbal cues induced cooperation. When interviews used long pauses or made particular facial expressions, Etter-Lewis encouraged the women to express their pensiveness, in many instances allowing interviewees to uncover information that may have gone undisclosed” (Troutman 2001, 215). In this instance, silence is acting as a pathway to re/discovery and community building without the voiced or guided projections of a public discourse. The silence is a moment in which to challenge normative gazes and constructions of identity for Black women; it is a moment made for physical, ethical, and social shifting of identities and cognition, which, in turn, validate experiences. Beyoncé does not *announce* the coalition with #BlackLivesMatter nor the entry of the mothers most notably impacted by police violence; she silently includes them in the conversation by way of visual expression. Understanding the pain, grief, strength, and hope accompanied with the presence of these Black mothers symbolize the multiple dimensions and

narratives re/covered with AAWL, that is both verbal and nonverbal. The absence of utterances in “Daddy Lessons” or “Six-Inch Heels” gives us room to read Beyoncé’s silence as part of her use of AAWL. This specific rhetorical and linguistic marker asks us to re/negotiate ideals of womanhood and counter the ways in which we implicitly or explicitly maneuver white, male, patriarchal constructs of womanhood as a binary.

Beyisms: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Analysis

Beyoncé’s unapologetically Black, Southern womanhood did not surface to the public sphere by chance. The sounds and silences in her music, poems, and images are rhetorical and linguistic markers of a specific identity, one that navigates Black (women) discourses. The explicit, rhetorical exercise of using specific linguistic markers or the absence of certain linguistic markers has direct impact on the type of social contexts available to Black women. These audibles, if you will, are accompanied with “This ideology [linguistic matter and sociocultural context as dependent of one another] [that] is enmeshed in cultural beliefs of fairness and equality—about life and expectations in conversation,” Morgan explains (Morgan 2004, 56). “[V]erbal skill is a force of both celebration and contestation as their identities and ethics of the past and present are negotiated through discourse,” Morgan explains, (Morgan 2004, 58). Beyoncé uses this to her advantage in *Lemonade*. For example, some songs like “Hold Up” and “Sorry” use AAL more frequently than other discursive features; however, the song “Daddy Lesson” rarely uses common linguistic markers often associated with AAL or AAWL. “Hold up” uses five variations of AAL such as “g-dropping”—the absence of the “g” *sound*—and “r-deletion”—the absence of the “r” sound in various words. However, in “Daddy Lessons” the potential for these same features are present, but she explicitly emphasizes the hollering that

accompanies the instrumentation as the most frequent trait. See charts below for full description of features and for juxtaposition of the two songs.

Feature Frequency

Feature	"Pray You Catch Me"	"Hold Up"	"Don't Hurt Yourself"	"Sorry"	"6 Inch"	"Daddy Lessons"	"Love Drought"	"Sandcastles"	"Forward"	"Freedom"	"All Night Long"	"Formation"
G-Dropping	11 [13]	5 [8]	8 [10]	17 [27]	2 [6]	4 [4]	8 [8]	0 [0]	0 [0]	8 [8]	1 [3]	3 [4]
r-deletion	0 [4]	9 [20]	10 [28]	6 [12]	6 [21]	0 [7]	0 [11]	0 [5]	0 [2]	5 [3]	11 [15]	4 [17]
non-verbal marker	54 [0]	4 [0]	20 [29]	3 [9]	4 [4]	125 [125]	0 [1]	3 [16]	0 [0]	2 [5]	1 [4]	1 [48]
copula absence	0 [8]	0 [44]	2 [39]	4 [46]	17 [22]	0 [9]	2 [16]	0 [9]	0 [0]	0 [26]	3 [9]	7 [19]
Absence of Third Person sing. "s"	1 [15]	0 [36]	0 [5]	0 [16]	8 [40]	0 [13]	0 [4]	0 [2]	0 [0]	0 [8]	0 [7]	3 [70]
Final Consonant Cluster Deletion	0 [2]	10 [55]	4 [9]	5 [6]	3 [4]	0 [4]	3 [13]	0 [9]	0 [0]	2 [18]	19 [19]	7 [7]
Front Consonant Deletion	0 [0]	0 [0]	3 [4]	12 [10]	1 [1]	3 [3]	2 [2]	1 [1]	0 [0]	6 [6]	0 [0]	13 [16]
'dis'/'dat'/'dem'/'dese") (i.e. alveolar stops)	0 [0]	5 [51]	2 [7]	5 [10]	0 [23]	0 [1]	0 [13]	0 [10]	0 [0]	0 [7]	6 [6]	7 [9]

*Key: actual [potential]

Feature Frequency Comparison (Percentage)

	G-droppin g	r-deletion	Non-verbal marker	Copula absence	Absence of Third Person sing. "s"	Final Consonant Cluster Deletion	Front Consonant Deletion	"dis"/'dat'/'dem'/'dese") (i.e. alveolar stops)
Hold Up	.625	.45	0	0	0	.18	0	.10
Daddy Lessons	1.00	0	1.00	0	0	0	1.00	0

This rhetorical choice represents her choosing various contextualized identities for Beyoncé and her audience. As a result, we hear this rhetorical function (i.e. code-switching) in her use of language and delivery. These features are not only reserved for Black speech communities;

however, some characteristics like the absence of the “r,” are more frequent in particular communities like southern or working-class and Black communities making Beyoncé’s use of these features more compelling and pertinent to the validation of her intersectional identities which she proclaims in public/private spheres.

Moreover, the Black feminist tradition and use of AAWL translate linguistically into syntactical and phonetic occurrences. Beyoncé “g-drops” in her album approximately 70 times and incorporates nonverbal markers like laughter and hollers over 100 times in *Lemonade*. Although this data for nonverbal utterances is skewed by the overabundance and explicit use of hollering in one particular song “Daddy Lessons,” the recognition of these linguistic and rhetorical features as available tools are still relevant and important. These factors, like the phonetic constructions such as r-lessness (48 times), makes Beyoncé’s linguistic and rhetorical navigation of Southern, Black womanhood interesting and valid. In fact, the incorporation of these linguistic markers suggest Beyoncé’s cultivation and demonstration of her Southern, Black woman identity *is firmly* constructed by the conditioning of her acceptance within various Black public/private spheres.

As such, we hear the rhetorical and linguistic features Beyoncé uses to code-switch, such as the use of Standard American English in “Daddy Lessons” juxtaposed with AAL during her rap break in “Hold Up” for instance. This flexibility of language ultimately opens various pathways for her to navigate and perform the complexities of womanhood through language in *Lemonade*. Although this feature has been marked as significant, her explicit use of r-lessness, for example, throughout her songs is most impressive and telling of her rhetorical weaving between various Black public and private spaces. Notice this example from “Hold Up” written in red: “Let’s imagine **fa** a moment dat chu **neva** made a name **fa yaself**” (“Hold Up”). We do not

see these markers, the “r-lessness,” in “Daddy Lessons” which tells us her use of AAWL is a rhetorical expression and extension of spectacle and representation of Black women’s intersectional identities. Erik R Thomas and Guy Bailey describe particular features in AAL (Thomas and Bailey 2015, 403-19). A common example of AAL represented throughout the album is “r-lessness” or the absence of “r.” The importance of the r-lessness seen in AAL resonates. “[H]istorically r-lessness occurred in White varieties in the Lower South, it is most often associated with AAE, and for good reason: r-lessness is characteristic not only of most traditional varieties of AAE in the South but also of many non-southern AAE varieties” (Thomas and Bailey 2015, 403-19). Moreover, Thomas and Bailey include Walt Wolfram’s studies to support this argument: “Wolfram (1969) showed that in Detroit r-lessness decreases as social class rises and speaking style becomes more formal” (Thomas and Bailey 2015, 403-19). Therefore, Beyoncé’s explicit use of AAWL, specifically in terms of r-lessness, squarely and explicitly positions her in Southern, Black discourses.

As suggested by Thomas and Bailey, African American Language is more likely to utilize syntax with these characteristics, although Black speech does not hold exclusive privileges over these traits, as mentioned before. However, what this *does* suggest for Beyoncé, then, is that she is not only fluent in AAWL, but that she has the autonomy and cultural cache to shift between various identities and discourses. *Lemonade* is exercising the complexities of her identity: Southern, Black woman. She develops and pushes the boundaries of intersectional identities including race, gender, class, and location³. The more frequent or more comfortable she becomes with this identity in public, the more often we hear these shifts that mark her as a part of the Black Southern (women’s) community.

³ See Tyina Steptoe’s chapter in this reader.

This explicit use of language between songs and within the same album shows her prowess in navigating Black public/private discourses, and shows us the rhetorical function of language enabling her to bridge musical genres while asserting Black women and African American culture into predominately white, historically co-opted spaces. Beyoncé's public expression of the self manifests through language constructed by her communal discourses. She presents an unapologetically Black, Southern woman identity that challenges white, male patriarchy. It is in this cultural reading that I see Beyoncé's lyrics giving us insight into Black women's rhetoric, language, and discourse—like narrative strategies—as important methods of communication (Morgan, 1996; 1998; 2002; 2004). To conclude, I argue that these characteristics, both linguistic and rhetorical phenomena, are examples of the navigation of identities seen within African American Women's Language. Beyoncé shows us ways to assert complex selfhoods and heal in public and private spaces. The combination of linguistic features, verbal and nonverbal, specifically demonstrates a structure for nuancing intersectional identities, thus, providing an indicator for constructing a web of pathways validating Black women's experiences, healing, and acknowledging one's shifting identity in oral/aural platforms. Beyoncé's internal consciousness-raising through validating her cultural and communal identity is represented in linguistic and rhetorical fashion in *Lemonade*. Her language and sonic rhetoric make a political statement of being unapologetically Black, and this message, now, parallels her body as performing the concretization of her Southern (Black) identity.

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