

Research focuses on how Canadian rapper Drake's 'hybrid identity' contributed to success

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Media Studies PhD student Amara Pope is garnering national media attention for her research on Canadian rapper Drake, a project that credits his early success as an artist to a curated image that highlights a hybrid identity. Credit: Adela Talbot // Western News

When Drake first broke onto the music scene, he climbed the charts. Fast.

His first studio album, *Thank Me Later*, debuted at No. 1 on the U.S. Billboard 200 in 2010 and was certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America. Drake's next albums, *Take Care* (which earned him a Grammy for Best Rap album) in 2011 and *Nothing Was the Same* in 2013, were certified quadruple and triple platinum, respectively. Two subsequent mixtapes saw similar chart successes, while 2016's *Views* became the first album by a solo male in more than a decade to sit atop Billboard 200 for 10 weeks.

This kind of rapid success – according to Western doctoral student Amara Pope – might just have something to do with Drake's "hybrid identity."

Before coming to Western to pursue her PhD in Media Studies last fall, Pope wrote an academic paper looking at three early music videos by Drake – [HYFR](#), [Worse Behavior](#) and [Started from the Bottom](#). In those videos, she explored identity politics and the interplay of identities of the Canadian rapper, singer, songwriter and actor.

Pope recently presented the paper at two conferences and has been building on her ideas ever since. Her research is drawing national media attention and has been featured in *The London Free Press*, *The Toronto Star* and *Toronto Life*, as well as featured on CBC and CTV, among other [media outlets](#).

"I was assessing the ways in which Drake connects to different communities through the particular images, sounds and lyrics (in the three videos), using those different forms of communication in different forms, in that particular medium," Pope said.

"I chose these three because they were his earlier videos, and I was very much interested in how he jumped the charts and climbed the music ladder so quickly, constructing such a strong fan base."

She concluded Drake's success stemmed from an early-on, carefully curated identity that reflected a certain Canadian characteristic.

"Because of the ways he posed himself as a hybrid through the different music videos, what I found was he was constructing an identity based on being both black and white, Jewish and Catholic, Canadian and American and this high-class/low-class member of society," Pope explained.

Drake, who was born to a black Catholic father from Memphis, Tenn., and a white Jewish mother from Toronto, capitalized on these performances of identity and aligned himself with different racial, national, economic and political communities, Pope noted. He "really promoted himself as this Canadian hybrid, a diverse individual.

"Canada really prides itself as this multicultural nation. Drake being a Canadian artist, he was really able to draw from that kind of ideology and hold this type of diverse identity," she continued.

Pope's work is the first academic foray into the Canadian icon that Drake has become, and the fact her topic is accessible to academics and people outside the university is helping her cultivate ideas and further her research.

"He's a pretty new artist and having the kind of feedback I'm getting from both the pop culture side of things, as well as the academic side, is great. It's been fun to do interviews and be asked if I like him and JLo together, versus what kind of theories and what kind of theoretical frameworks I'm using. It's been a nice dynamic to draw on the two,"

Pope continued.

And while her research has drawn attention from various media outlets, she has yet to hear from Drake, she laughed.

Pope hopes to continue and build on her Drake research as she works towards her PhD dissertation.

"Musical artists are increasingly affecting culture, language and our society. In this PhD program at Western, I'm hoping to explore musical artists and the ways they branch out to different ventures outside of the music industry," she added.

"I'm looking at the ways they create different ventures to create their public image and enforce a particular lifestyle. I'm looking at different industries, such as clothing lines, apps. Drake has his own restaurant in Toronto. I'm looking at how they contribute to the star image as the theoretical framework I'm using. Musical artists are really important to study for understanding our culture and society today, so my title will be 'Musical Artists as Entrepreneurs.'"

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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