

# The Impacts of American Hip-Hop Culture on International Diaspora: A Biographical Thematic Analysis of Jonatan Håstad

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## ABSTRACT

The genre of hip-hop originally emerged as a response to the socioeconomic issues in black American communities such as poverty and drug use during the 1970s. As the genre spread globally, it grew to include more international artists, each reflecting a variety of issues and behaviors unique to their cultural communities. Today, some of the genre's most popular themes include drugs, materialism, and violence. Although experts within the current body of research have proposed different methods to explore the dissemination of hip-hop culture amongst international artists more generally, there is a lack of investigation into the effects of today's most prevalent themes on the lives of artists themselves. In order to explore this gap, this paper conducts a biographical thematic analysis of the life and lyrics of Jonatan Håstad, a popular Swedish hip-hop artist with a distinct proximity to drug abuse and American influence. Findings clearly indicate that aspects of materialism within American culture inspired Håstad's early career as well as enabled his drug use and sequent mental health issues during his time spent within the United States. These results are helpful for community development professionals, as studying the ways that materialism and drug use contribute to feelings of loss, nihilism, and damage of personal relationships can aid them in understanding how representations of material culture within hip-hop may influence the career paths of young international hip-hop artists entering the increasingly large genre.

## **Introduction**

The genre of hip-hop emerged as a response to the socioeconomic issues in black American communities such as poverty and drug use during the 1970s (Hollander and Quinn, 2020). As the genre spread globally and grew to include more international artists, it began to reflect a greater variety of issues and behaviors unique to different cultural communities. Distinct issues and topics discussed by foreign artists began to merge with those of popular American hip-hop artists, exemplified by the use of originally American slang in the lyrics of foreign artists (Motley and Henderson, 2008). This blurring of lines between different cultures is further demonstrated beyond lyrics to the personal lives of international artists who have become heavily intertwined with the United States during their careers. Thus, artists' lives and lyrics may offer insight into the effects of American hip-hop's dissemination of particular behavioral aspects like drug use on the genre's international diaspora.

Jonatan Håstad, a popular Swedish rapper commonly known as Yung Lean, is heavily related to this pattern as he grew up listening to American artists and began to make frequent references to American popular culture in his lyrics, such as allusions to the 99 cents Arizona Iced Tea product (Cooper, 2019). Researching events in his life may provide themes that are reflected in his music and thus contain distinct messages that reveal the most potent side effects of immersion within American hip-hop culture. Thus, through a biographical thematic analysis, this study aims to identify how Håstad's drug use and materialistic influences changed in relationship to his proximity to American hip-hop culture via analyzing those themes in his lyrics over a select

portion of his discography. By exploring Håstad's personal life and lyrics, a deeper understanding of the positive and negative aspects of American hip-hop culture's global influence can be drawn.

## Literature Review

### Community Development Practice and Drug Use in Hip-Hop

The genre of hip-hop is beginning to be considered more seriously in academic and professional spaces due to its historical emergence in response to socioeconomic conditions in black communities, originally in the Bronx, New York. Justin Hollander, Tufts University professor of urban planning, and Jennifer Quinn, economic development manager, discuss how a wide variety of professionals such as social workers or out-reach workers can better understand urban conditions and issues embedded in different cultures by analyzing themes in hip-hop lyrics from artists who experience those cultures, such as drugs, materialism, and violence (2020). (To clarify, materialism refers to "a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things" according to Merriam-Webster. Therefore discussions of acquiring physical objects, currency, and disdain for spiritual values such as community will constitute materialism.) Furthermore, research increasingly focuses on using and developing tools to analyze discussions of mental health-specific themes in music in general. For example, Ashley Miller of the University of Kentucky focuses on determining the potential therapeutic effects of songs based on their themes. In the study, the researchers deployed a computer algorithm called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) to determine if lyrics displayed certain indicators, such as emotional positivity or negativity (2017). The frequency of studies and algorithms such as this indicate that less research may be needed by community development professionals when it comes to determining how hip-hop music is received by listeners and instead should be focused on filling a gap in analyzing the processes artists go through when making the music themselves. This may aid professionals to better understand the unique issues that artists face.

One such prevalent issue is the frequency of drug use in the upper bounds of the American hip-hop community. While Tirhakah Love, writer for *The Guardian*, argues that discussions of drug use are not unique to hip-hop and, in fact, occur more frequently in the country music genre, other authors argue that hip-hop has a more unique relationship to drug use (2017). Hollander and Quinn explain this relationship as an effect of the genre's exceptional proximity to struggles with drug use in the African American communities it originated from (2020). Simultaneously, communications researcher at the University of Chicago, Dr. Alex Kresovich, and others discuss how hip-hop artists today are lifting the stigma of mental health as individual struggles with depression and anxiety become more openly discussed among popular rappers (2021). Further, it may be true that these struggles are influenced specifically by drug use and materialism. This suggests that further research could be done to expose a potential gap in understanding the societal pressures in artists' lives that are causing these rappers to become more vocal about their relationships with mental health.

### Hip-Hop's International Diaspora and American Influence

In the last several decades, hip-hop evolved from its origins to become a diverse genre spread internationally. Despite this, little research has been conducted concerning hip-hop within individual foreign countries, such as Sweden, or the patterns of which specific aspects of American culture are more frequently disseminated. However, more broad research by Carol Motley of the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Dr. Geraldine Henderson of Loyola University investigates hip-hop's international diaspora to discover a trend of 'glocalization,' in which many international hip-hop artists combine American themes with struggles unique to the area and culture of the artist (2008). Rutgers professor of sociology Daniel Semenza offers a possible explanation

of this effect in that people are heavily influenced by and attached to the music they listen to when they are young (2018). For example, if an artist listened to American hip-hop when they were younger, they may experiment with similar sounds and topics as they produce and write their own songs. An apparent connection can be made between this research and that of Kresovich and other's, suggesting that the same lifestyles that made hip-hop artists anxious years ago during current artists' childhoods may have influenced their behaviors later in life to experience even more anxiety and depression themselves, constructing a positive feedback loop of mental health struggle (2021). This leads to a more specific area of research that interrogates how American hip-hop culture's reliance on drugs and materialism has influenced the mental health of international artists by looking at patterns in the lives and lyrics of these artists.

### Jonatan Håstad's Artistic Evolution and Personal Struggles

Jonatan Håstad, known professionally as Yung Lean, is a popular member of the Swedish hip-hop community who has declared himself heavily influenced by American hip-hop artists according to freelance journalist Duncan Cooper (2019). For Ian Newberg of *The Skyline Horizon*, this influence turned outward as Håstad garnered his own fame. After rising to prominence at the age of 16 in 2013 with his hit single "Ginseng Strip 2002," Håstad grew to be well-regarded amongst the genre's top stars due to his unique sound, appearing on songs with Frank Ocean and Travis Scott (2022). Cooper contextualizes that Håstad would go on tour across North America and Europe, increasing his experimentation with drugs like lean (codeine mixed with Sprite), Xanax, and cocaine. To clarify, the stage name "Yung Lean" comes partially from the former drug, but also from his full name "Jonatan Aron Leandroer Håstad". However, while recording his second studio album *Warlord* in 2015, Håstad overdosed and was subsequently checked into a psychiatric hospital in Miami. Shortly thereafter, Håstad returned to Sweden away from American culture to recover and spend time with family and friends. (2019)



**Figure 1.** Håstad Performing in Chicago (Kfare, 2016)

Following his recovery, Håstad has evolved as an artist, producing substantially more distinctive messages that reflect his experiences with recovery and drug use according to Joe Price, contributor for *Dazed* magazine (2017). Specifically, *Stranger* is widely regarded by fans such as Nikita Shtarkman, writer for the *Johns Hopkins News Letter*, to contain significantly more emotional depth compared to his other work (2017). Håstad elaborates on this depth in an interview with Price as he discusses the evolution in his artistic style from the “darker” *Warlord* album to an “easier” sound on *Stranger* (2017). Thus, albums and side projects produced by Håstad during this period of his life may contain further insight into his relationship to American culture.

Although it is recognized that many artists in American hip-hop uniquely struggle with mental health, there is a lack of research on how the genre’s international diaspora may respond to similar influences differently as they enter the genre themselves. Due to his unique connections to themes of drug use and materialism, the purpose of this paper is to conduct a biographical thematic analysis of Jonatan Håstad and his music to better understand how the American hip-hop culture’s materialistic and drug-related influences impact the mental health of foreign artists. This will enable an improved understanding of the pressures international artists face upon entering the genre.

## Method

### Biographical Criticism & Thematic Analysis

To understand Håstad’s relationship with drug use, materialism, and mental health, I chose to conduct a biographical thematic analysis of lyrics in particular songs based on themes from relevant discussions of his personal life in music and interviews. Conveniently, biographical criticism is meant to consider larger societal influences that may subconsciously influence the artist according to academic researcher Teresa Manzella, Master’s thesis in Liberal Studies at Metro State University (2011). Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that focuses on reading, identifying, and interpreting data and themes. This method will search for codes that represent the themes revealed by the biographical criticism and then consider how these themes are presented differently over time.

For the purposes of this study, American culture will be defined and constituted by the organizations of people, art, and customs that originate from the United States as well as the influences those things have with external places, people, or events. Merriam-Webster defines hip-hop as “a cultural movement associated especially with rap music,” and rap is “a type of music of African American origin in which rhythmic and usually rhyming speech is chanted to a musical accompaniment.”

### Sampling Method

Data was chosen based on the time it was produced in relation to the events of Håstad’s personal life. The purpose of this study is to focus on Håstad’s life directly before and after his overdose as this was a time in which his relationship with drugs was most intense, so music produced between the years 2015 and 2017 will be analyzed. The researcher isolated four albums and a single across two different stage names on major music streaming platforms: *Stranger*, *Frost God*, and *Warlord (Deluxe)* by Yung Lean and *Psychopath Ballands* by jonatan leandoer96 (2016; 2016; 2017; 2016). Because this data set includes 55 different songs, additional criteria were used to narrow the scope of data to 17 songs: popularity and whether or not the song had an accompanying music video. Popularity was chosen because it may closely reflect the quality of the song and the existence of a music video reveals additional aesthetics useful in interpreting the song’s meaning. Popularity

was determined based on the view counts listed on *Genius.com* on November 8, 2023, with a minimum cut-off of 50,000 views.

The complete list of songs

| <b>“Song Name”, Album</b>                                                    | <b>View Count</b> | <b>Music Video</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| “Agony”, <i>Stranger</i> (Yung Lean, 2017).                                  | 280,500           | No                 |
| “Red Bottom Sky”, <i>Stranger</i> (Yung Lean, 2017).                         | 238,700           | Yes                |
| “Miami Ultras”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).                   | 231,500           | Yes                |
| “Afghanistan”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).                    | 134,200           | Yes                |
| “Hoover”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).                         | 120,700           | Yes                |
| “Hotel in Minsk”, <i>Psychopath Ballads</i> (jonatan leandoer96, (2016).     | 95,100            | No                 |
| “Never Again”, <i>Psychopath Ballads</i> (jonatan leandoer96, (2016).        | 41,500            | No                 |
| “Immortal”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).                       | 61,300            | No                 |
| “Highway Patrol (Ft. Bladee)”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).    | 134,000           | Yes                |
| “Eye Contact”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).                    | 68,200            | Yes                |
| “AF1s (Ft. Ecco2k)”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).              | 83,700            | No                 |
| “Hocus Pocus (Ft. Bladee)”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).       | 63,300            | No                 |
| “Yellowman”, <i>Stranger</i> (Yung Lean, 2017).                              | 61,400            | No                 |
| “Hennessy and Sailor Moon (Ft. Bladee)”, <i>Frost God</i> (Yung Lean, 2016). | 249,600           | Yes                |
| “Crystal City (Ft. A\$AP Ferg)”, <i>Frost God</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).         | 68,100            | No                 |
| “Sippin (Ft. ManeMane4CGG)”, <i>Warlord (Deluxe)</i> (Yung Lean, 2016).      | 36,300            | Yes                |
| “Metallic Intuition”, <i>Stranger</i> (Yung Lean, 2017).                     | 54,200            | Yes                |

## Coding

Biographical criticism is based on constructing an understanding of an artist’s personal life and actions in order to build context to then analyze their work. Thus, to better understand Håstad’s personal life holistically, a collection of interviews and documentaries from across Håstad’s career was gathered and studied to dissect particular themes and patterns. Ten media samples were chosen to reflect different experiences, such as particular albums or events. They were also selected based on the credibility of the source and recency. After a thorough review of these sources, the coder developed a timeline of events in the relevant time period and then isolated distinct themes related to the research question to be used in the thematic analysis. This enables a

greater depth when analyzing songs by building a larger understanding of the events the lyrics are referring to. For example, when considering references to a particular drug in a song, it is important to know what interactions the artist has with that specific drug in real life.

Next, the researcher began conducting the thematic analysis by qualitatively analyzing each collection of songs in chronological order. First, the researcher read lyrics three or more times to code more literal interpretations of experiences or events that could be described. Then, the researcher listened to the music and viewed visual aspects if applicable to code the literary and aesthetic meaning of particular songs based on lyrics and actions pictured in the music video. Codes of particular themes were first interpreted individually. Later, comparisons of codes with similar themes across different songs were considered to understand how the presentation of themes changed over time. For example, this could involve recognizing that references to mental health gradually become more positive over time. Once these relationships were established, correlations between themes were identified. For example, this involved analyzing how materialism influenced much of Håstad's drug use. The researcher also considered the date that songs were produced to correlate them with simultaneous events in Håstad's life. This enabled a greater understanding of the different perspectives Håstad has on similar topics.

Interpretative research based on coding for particular themes within music and music videos lyrically is subjective in nature. As such, potential bias may occur from the researcher's pre-existing connections or associations with data. To reduce this risk, the *Genius.com* lyrics annotations were considered for the process of thematic analysis. These comments are moderated by official platform editors and require ultimate approval based on a list of "10 Annotation Commandments" made to deter misinformation ("How Genius Works," n.d.).

The complete list of interviews, articles, and documentaries:

| Title                                                                                                         | Form                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| "Yung Lean: In My Head" (Burman, 2020).                                                                       | Documentary           |
| "Yung Lean x MONTREALITY" (Montreality, 2019).                                                                | Video Interview       |
| "KERWIN FROST TALKS TO YUNG LEAN" (Frost, 2020).                                                              | Video Interview       |
| "Home Alone with Yung Lean: The Cloud Rap icon on drugs, creativity and his album STARZ" (Arte TRACKS, 2020). | Video Interview       |
| "Yung Lean on Frank Ocean, Fredo Santana & His Battle w/ Addiction & Death" (MTV News, 2018).                 | Video Interview       |
| "Yung Lean: Doctor Said He's Gonna Be A Sad Boy" (Walker, 2022).                                              | Transcribed Interview |
| "I'm genuine – and a bit strange': emo rapper Yung Lean bares his soul" (Aroesti, 2020).                      | Transcribed Interview |
| "Yung Lean Is Fulfilling His Prophecy" (Angell, 2020).                                                        | Transcribed Interview |
| "Yung Lean's Second Chance" (Cooper, 2019).                                                                   | Transcribed Interview |

“Yung Lean: strange days” (Price, 2017).

Transcribed Interview

## Findings and Analysis

### Biographical Criticism

#### *Early Career: Materialism and American Culture*

The biographical criticism revealed themes similar to those expected based on the literature review. The entrance of Håstad into the hip-hop community began at a young age as a teen obsessed with American culture according to *MTV News*. This led him to rap about aspects of American popular culture through references to consumer items such as Gatorade and Arizona Ice Tea. (2018) This attachment also informed the largest expansion of his early career, which was majorly centered around the United States and aided by his manager and close friend, Barron Machat (Burman, 2020). In an interview with Kerwin Frost, Håstad discusses how he and his friends sought to travel to America because “all [their] inspiration came from there,” referring to artists such as Outkast, Missy Elliot, and Clams Casino (2020). This interest confirms the pattern of globalization present in the Literature Review as Håstad himself argues that all music should be constructed based on inspirations from other places and that regional differences are intrinsic to hip-hop in an interview with Nico Walker (2022). However, some of Håstad’s closest friends were wary of this. Producer Carl-Mikael Göran Berlander, known in the industry as Yung Gud, voices his frustration in constantly being “fed” with “American information” as a great force of homogenization in an interview with Duncan Cooper. Indeed, a large issue in this influence is the strong form of materialism unique to America. Håstad concurs that this culture influenced him greatly, mentioning how emphasis surrounding money and drugs in the United States differs from the “non-materialistic lifestyle” present in Sweden, and claiming that “once you do get to the U.S. and someone meets you at the airport and gives you money and gives you drugs, we go too crazy” (2019).

Håstad’s earliest influences as a child laid the foundation for the artist he would later become as globalization and media dispersion primed his adoption of materialist values before he was ever directly immersed in American hip-hop culture. Given the mixed perspectives on how this influence impacted his life, it is clear that an important role of the thematic analysis is illuminating how these materialistic influences manifested within his music and influenced his sequential patterns of drug use.



**Figure 2.** Early Yung Lean Music Video. Author’s Screenshot (Burman, 2020).

### *Entering the Mainland: Drugs and Tragedy*

Håstad maintained a relationship with drug use as long as he has been releasing music, demonstrated by his stage name “Yung Lean”. Although Håstad does not consider drugs to be a large part of his identity according to an interview with Rachel Aroesti, his struggles with addiction ultimately altered the tragedy and trajectory of his life greatly (2020). As shown in the Vice Documentary, while Håstad toured the United States and spent more time away from home, he started abusing drugs such as Adderall, Xanax, cocaine, codeine, and marijuana, contributing to his mental instability. This demonstrates a correlation between proximity to the United States and his level of drug use, as the catalog of drugs he used and referenced in his music expanded greatly upon touring the United States.

Eventually, this drug use began to have strong ramifications on Håstad’s mental health (Burman, 2020). When his tour ended in Miami, Florida, Håstad continued to lose his grip on reality as he battled undiagnosed bipolar disorder. This struggle culminated in an overdose from mixing a variety of drugs, characterized by hallucinations and self-harm. During his overdose, Håstad’s close friend and rapper Benjamin Reichwald, known as Bladee to fans, categorized Håstad as “totally gone.” Håstad was subsequently placed in a psychiatric facility. To add to the tragedy, Barron Machat, his close friend and manager, died in a car accident in an attempt to bring Håstad his music hard drive. Håstad was not informed of Machat’s death until he had returned to Sweden to recover, causing him to enter a further state of depression. (2021) This series of cataclysmic events would forever alter the rest of Håstad’s career and personal life.

Although his battle with addiction and depression likely stemmed from the materialistic authority that American hip-hop culture enabled, specificities warrant that drug use be established as the second main theme for the thematic analysis as it represents a distinct stage and severity of American influence. One theme may have caused the other, yet they have a large degree of independence given that the resolution of materialist influence may not be reverse causal with Håstad’s drug use. Investigating the theme of drug use will involve considering his reliance on and abuse of drugs to better understand the effects of addiction, whereas exploring the theme of materialism will entail understanding the underlying desire for fame, wealth, and lifestyle that contributed to his drug use in the first place.



### *Returning to Sweden: Maturation and Recovery*

After returning from Miami, a distinction between Yung Lean as a character and Jonatan Håstad as a human being was revealed. Håstad continued to struggle with addiction and he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder after returning to a psychiatric facility in 2017 (Burman, 2020). Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that “causes extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression)” according to the Mayo Foundation. Not coincidentally, 2017 is also the year that he released *Stranger*, the latest project in our dataset. The director of the Vice documentary, Henrik Burman, reflects that this is the album where “Yung Lean and Jonatan kind of grew into one person” as he began discussing his conflicting emotions and becoming more personal within his music (Burman, 2020). This development offers an opportunity to better understand the two established themes as it provides insight into how drastic changes in his environment potentially altered those patterns of materialism and drug use. Further, in an interview with Jack Angell, Håstad reflects that art gave him great therapy, as it was an outlet to express his desires (2020). Analyzing Håstad’s music proves the optimal place for such an understanding to be generated.



**Figure 3.** *Håstad in Forest After Returning to Sweden.* Author’s Screenshot (Burman, 2020).

### Thematic Analysis

#### *Warlord: Nihilism and Overdose*

Each song was analyzed in chronological order to understand the shift of themes over time and the personal events of Håstad’s life. The first album, *Warlord*, was released a year after the 2015 overdose, however many of its songs were recorded before which offers a more varied perspective on Håstad’s life in Miami (Yung Lean, 2016). Almost every song on the project has explicit ties to drug use or materialism in the form of wealth, fashion, and cars.

It is clear that Håstad was entirely aware of the harm his habits were having on his body and relationships, therefore, a deeper reason for his addiction must exist. The song “Highway Patrol” suggests that Håstad

was conscious of his self-destructive path, as its music video was recorded in Miami before his overdose, implying the song may have been as well. Håstad's lyrics on the song appear to explain his risky lifestyle as a result of his pursuit of more wealth and flashier clothes that can never be entirely fulfilled. This perpetual dissatisfaction leads him to believe drug use is necessary to grapple with the inevitable lack of material things; on the track "Immortal," he describes how the use of drugs transports him to a fairytale world where his highs give him a sense of fleeting invincibility in the face of his current misery. The idea of his destructive lifestyle enabling him to exercise control over his life is also present in the song "Miami Ultras" as his boisterous behavior is described as his greatest sense of security in the face of overwhelming nihilism. "Hoover" and "Hocus Pocus" directly clarify the existential connection between these patterns, as Håstad's only way to cope with his nihilistic thoughts is to create his own meaning through his rambunctious patterns that attempt to defy the natural order of life and sober consciousness. The overwhelming feeling of nihilism present within all these songs suggests his desires for material objects are not truly fulfilling his character and are, in fact, a great cause of his sadness, contributing to his drug use as a coping mechanism. Further, Håstad's simultaneous addiction and depression seem to have trapped him in a positive feedback loop of relying on drugs to numb his sadness while making him even more miserable in the long term. Both the materialistic culture and drug use have proven to contribute to his sadness, and therefore removing American influence may aid in recovery but will not be sufficient by itself given his addiction.



**Figure 4.** *Figure on a Motorcycle Over a Graveyard.* Author's Screenshot (Yung Lean, 2015).

This hypothesis is proven in songs that contain a clearer reflection of his overdose, where it becomes clear that his time spent in a rehabilitation center was not enough to cleanse Håstad of his dependence. For example, the song "Sippin," which refers to drinking lean, illuminates that he still maintains a similar lifestyle from before his overdose where drugs help him "lose [his] mind." However, another song, "Afghanistan," provides a more humble reflection of his overdose and continual marijuana usage, where he expresses that he is working much harder to produce music despite constant mental health struggles as a "maniac," foreshadowing his undiagnosed bipolar disorder. He is unable to find a justification or commit to abandoning drugs altogether due to the varied cycles of this disorder.

### *In Between Albums: Hope and Transparency*

Håstad's overdose was not the only significant event in his life at this time, as he also experienced the loss of many of his personal relationships due to his drug abuse. "Eye Contact" is the last song analyzed on *Warlord* and describes that his addiction led him to become scared and feel guilty for hurting those around him. Nonetheless, he remained unable to abandon his habits. After leaving Miami, he had to reconcile with the fact that his habits affected those around him and not just himself as he still struggles to control his actions. This concern for others may be the driving force in his attempts at recuperation which marks a shift away from individualist pursuits of money and drugs.

After the release of *Warlord*, and while Håstad continued to spend more time in his native country Sweden, his music began to reflect a more hopeful theme, though still not separated from drug use and materialism. However, his music began to shed light on a new major influence on his life that the biographical criticism did not: his partner. "Hennessy and Sailor Moon" is a love song from the project *Frost God* that describes his desire to provide for his significant other who helped him after his first overdose (Yung Lean, 2016). Sadly, Håstad eventually released another song, "Hotel in Minsk" on the album *Psychopath Ballads*, where he clarifies this woman left him for another man, further contributing to his despair (jonatan leandoer96, 2016). Although never explicitly stated, it can be inferred that this may have been a result of frustration with his material lifestyle, as Håstad described how his addiction damaged his relationships on "Eye Contact." This is demonstrated in "Crystal City" where he concedes he still lives a lifestyle fueled by women, drugs, and money despite the comfort of his home. Unsuccessful attempts at reforming his drug use provided necessary disturbances that would force Håstad to significantly rethink his dependency more seriously.

Another song released at the same time, "Never Again," provides a reflection into his perception of his fame's interaction with his ongoing struggles, claiming to feel like a spectacle for others to watch. This is one of the first moments where Håstad opens up in his songs about his fame which may be related to him releasing it under a different stage name, "jonatan leandoer96," under which "Hotel in Minsk" was also released. These four songs, produced between his major albums *Warlord* and *Stranger*, illustrate the effects of his pursuits of fame and success on his personal life, as well as foreshadow future openness that Håstad would express on his next album, *Stranger*.

### *Stranger: Reflection and the Hip-Hop Industry*

Suggested to contain the greatest depth of any Yung Lean project in the range of this study, *Stranger* is the last source of songs analyzed (Yung Lean, 2017). The song "Metallic Intuition," unsurprisingly describes wealth, cars, drugs, and fame, yet offers a more mature reflection of his position within the rap industry. Rather than lacking faith in the future, he spends more time with his family and reflects on what his legacy will mean for others within the genre. Håstad understands that many younger artists use his music to develop their own style and recognizes his unique wisdom as a less traditional artist. However, this influence does not always make him exceptionally proud. Instead, he suggests he has become a "freakshow" for others to watch on the song "Yellowman." This song offers an allusion to the mythical land of Carcosa from *The King in Yellow*, a book by American writer Robert W. Chambers, suggesting that themes of art, creativity, romance, and horror will inevitably be part of his life. Håstad's inner turmoil when considering his position within the music genre is a clear reflection of his bipolar disorder. He is unable to determine if he is proud or ashamed of his work, and demonstrates a fragmented reflection of his perception of the American industry. He describes a fundamental sense of loss and laments that he will never be enough for his critical audience. This is likely due to the materialist culture's emphasis on constant improvement and, therefore, constant dissatisfaction.

Ongoing struggles are still prevalent as songs like "Agony" summarize Håstad's emotions during this time. After learning of Barron's death, he tries desperately to maintain his grip on reality while coming to terms with the consequences of his actions. Still, he remains confident in his progress as an individual and is thankful for his unique experiences. This sentiment is clear in "Red Bottom Sky," the final song reviewed. Here Håstad

acknowledges that there is much more to life than the “story [he] was told” of fame, wealth, and drugs. He may not have ended his drug use, but he has made progress emotionally as he now desires to improve his artistry in a way that is distinct from his original path. He was told an impossible story of infinite success and dreams, but this pursuit was unsustainable. Instead, he experienced significant tragedy, revealing the long-lasting implications of being enthralled by American hip-hop culture.



**Figure 5.** Haståd Crawling Out of the Ground. Author’s Screenshot (Yung Lean, 2017).

## Limitations

The biographical criticism faced limitations in that it was difficult to construct a timeline of events in Haståd’s life due to the lack of exact dates. This, coupled with the absence of knowledge concerning when individual songs were recorded, made it difficult to objectively link lyrics to particular times in Haståd’s life. However, the researcher was still able to roughly ascribe songs to moments in Haståd’s life due to the perspective of the lyrics. Further, thematic analysis is subjective, which could have led to potential errors in interpreting lyrics, songs, and music videos. While they were originally considered, the analysis strayed from using more subjective details such as aesthetics or tone as it became evident this interpretation likely varied significantly for different researchers. Therefore, there is less discussion of visual elements and artistic choices beyond lyrics.

It is also likely that Haståd’s music produced after 2017 contains reflective lyrics on specific moments in his life, but that was beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, future research may consider changes in themes over a longer period. Notably, Haståd was never sober in the timeframe chosen for this research, which may have limited the researcher’s understanding of his relationships with drugs in particular.

## Conclusion

These findings provide insight into understanding the broader effects of American cultural and musical influences on international artists by interpreting the messages present in Haståd’s lyrics. It is clear that aspects of materialism within American culture inspired Haståd’s early career as well as enabled his drug use during his time spent touring and producing within the United States. While this influence is referenced as drowning out his regional particularities as a great homogenizing force and potentially amplifying his drug use and insecurities, it also provided inspiration to deploy his unique creative tendencies and produce music in the first place. This demonstrates the scope of influence that American culture has as well as the nature of that influence

through materialism. These results are consistent with the surrounding body of relevant literature as they support the pattern of glocalization and the scope of the hip-hop genre's relationship to drug use. For community development professionals, viewing the ways that materialism and drug use contributed to feelings of loss, nihilism, damage of personal relationships, and overdose can aid them in understanding how representations of material culture within hip-hop may influence young hip-hop artists despite their original social location. Further, it is important to recognize that the existence of some negative aspects within hip-hop's messaging cannot be used to justify a disavowal of the genre writ large given its massive and diverse significance in urban communities (Hollander and Quinn, 2020).

Ultimately, Haståð's life is unique and it would be naive to apply the exact patterns of his life to other foreign artists within the industry. Therefore, more research could be done to investigate the lives and lyrics of other artists from different cultural backgrounds who found themselves enthralled with American hip-hop culture like Haståð. This would enable researchers to better understand whether the influence of American materialism leads to similar practices of drug use for other artists from more diverse backgrounds. Further, it would be productive to explore the way that American hip-hop is presented in foreign countries. For example, this study was unable to explore the conditions of Haståð's childhood exposure to the genre beyond his own personal accounts, but studying those conditions more rigorously may improve our understanding of the way the industry proliferates internationally. While Haståð's life was massively altered by the hip-hop industry, it would be ignorant to suggest these influences were entirely negative given Haståð's simultaneous evolution as an artist. His experiences provided him with the chance to produce a unique and creative style of art, capable of conveying messages that are relatable and therapeutic for himself and thousands of others.

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