Man Down: The Evolution of Masculinity and Mental Health Narratives in Rap Music

Rachel Hart,[1] Department of English, University of Bristol

Abstract

This article explores how one of the most typically hyper-masculine cultural arenas in Britain and America has evolved over the past 30 years, as rap artists decide to reject the stoicism of toxic masculinity in favour of promoting healthier conversations surrounding men's mental health and associated coping mechanisms. Though rap has always been vocal about mental distress, its dominant narratives have evolved over the past 30 years to talk more specifically and positively about mental health issues. Over time rap has begun promoting therapy, medication, self-care and treatment, rather than self-medication via drugs and alcohol, or violence against the self or others. This is symbiotically informing and being informed by society's changing ideas about masculinity and the construct of gender. In order to explore the evolution in discussions around men's mental health from the 1990s to the present day, this article is split into three sections, each focusing on a different decade. I closely analyse the lyrics of one rap song in each chapter, which has been selected to represent rap's general trends regarding discussions of mental health from that decade. I also briefly explore other songs that prove the decade's trends. This article draws upon academic research as well as personal interviews undertaken with Solomon OB (2016's National Poetry Slam champion), and Elias Williams, founder of MANDEM.com (an online media platform engaging with social issues and shining a light on young men of colour). I posit that rap culture is often wrongly overlooked as a forum for progressive social change, explaining why it is crucial that academia further appreciates and examines rap's potential for changing cultural perceptions of masculinity and mental health.

Keywords: Mental health, toxic masculinity, rap music, lyrical analysis, coping mechanisms, self-medication.

Introduction

In battle, when a soldier is incapacitated, 'Man down!' is shouted to emphasise that they urgently need help. Contrastingly, in civilian life, men with debilitating mental health difficulties are told to stoically 'man up', causing discussions surrounding men's mental health to become taboo. This stigmatisation has disastrous effects. In the UK alone, 84 men end their lives every week, with suicide being the single leading cause of death for men under 45 (CALM, 2017; Samaritans, 2017). For some men, displaying vulnerability can feel as if their self-sufficiency – frequently seen as synonymous with masculinity – is under threat (Perry, 2017). Paradoxically, it is this desire not to be viewed as vulnerable which contributes to men being three times more likely to commit suicide than women (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2017; Samaritans, 2017).

These differences do not just pertain to gender; certain ethnic groups are also at higher risk. People of African–Caribbean descent are most likely to be diagnosed with a severe mental illness (ONS, 2017) and are more likely than any other race to be sectioned against their will in the UK (National Institute for Mental Health England, 2003). Considering all of the aforementioned risk factors (age, gender and race), we might suggest that black men under the age of 45 are at serious risk of experiencing mental health issues. Yet, very limited research has been conducted into the mental health risks faced by this group. Rather, Reni Eddo-Lodge describes how, in clinical settings, black men 'are generally regarded by mental health staff as more aggressive, more alarming, more dangerous and more difficult to treat' (Eddo-Lodge, 2017: 71). This idea is often reinforced by mainstream media, which frequently villainises black men as violent and dangerous (Donaldson, 2015; Staples, 1982). Some media outlets, including influential tabloid newspapers, claim that this stereotype is proven true and perpetuated by rap music – one of the only cultural arenas (other than sport) where young black men dominate (Harrison, 2018; Staples, 1982). Surely, rather than demonising the art form predominantly created and consumed by a demographic at serious risk of mental health issues, it is worth analysing how rap lyrics discuss psychological stress and subsequent coping strategies? This article explores how rap music, one of the most hyper-masculine cultural arenas in Britain and America, has progressed its discussions of masculinity and mental health. I posit that over the past 30 years, rap artists have decided not to 'man up' but to 'man down', rejecting the burdens of stoic, toxic masculinity and instead choosing to promote healthier discussions around mental health issues.

Originating in the 1970s, modern-day rap has enabled the widespread dissemination of stories and sparked societal conversation about issues typically ignored by traditional media outlets. Chuck D, of seminal hip-hop group Public Enemy, famously described rap music as 'CNN for black culture' (George-Warren, 2001). In 2018, American rapper Kendrick Lamar (later discussed) even won a Pulitzer Prize for capturing 'the complexity of modern African-American life' on his album *DAMN* ('Pulitzer Winners', 2018). Despite its relatively short history, rap has symbiotically influenced modern society while simultaneously being influenced by it. To this end, Tricia Rose states that rap has found a way to 'unnerve and simultaneously revitalize American culture' (Rose, 1994: 185).

Considering this idea that rap is constantly in a dialogue with societal issues, this article traces the nuanced ways in which rap's mental health narratives have changed over the last 30 years, and the ways in which rap has been simultaneously influenced by, and is now influencing, modern ideas of masculinity. It asks how modern rap addresses – and might even be able to genuinely help – the crisis of poor mental health in men by spreading awareness of healthy coping mechanisms to its listeners. I posit that modern rap is contributing to the portrayal of a multifaceted and healthier version of masculinity, which may in turn help to dispel stigmas surrounding men discussing their mental health. I also argue that rap culture is often wrongly overlooked by mainstream media as a forum for progressive social change, explaining why it is crucial that academia further appreciates and examines rap's potential for changing cultural perceptions of masculinity and mental health.

Key definitions

Masculinity

Firstly, I will begin by unpacking my concept of 'masculinity' which is key to the understanding of this article. The idea of 'masculinity' varies across cultures and historical periods. This article explores the idea of twenty-first-century masculinity as is common throughout the UK and USA. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines 'masculinity' as 'qualities or attributes regarded as characteristic of men', providing the example: 'handsome, muscled, and driven, he's a prime example of masculinity' (OED, 2018). The example given highlights attractiveness, strength, power and ambition as typical traits of masculinity. In other texts, like Grayson Perry's *The Descent of Man*, one trait which is described as a 'central plank of masculinity' is self-sufficiency (Perry, 2017: 120). Self-sufficiency largely encapsulates the OED's examples of being muscled and driven; men are typically seen as more masculine if they are able to fend for themselves – physically, mentally, in the home, workplace or otherwise. This idea that men are expected to be entirely self-sufficient is an element of masculinity which is especially interrogated in this article.

Perry describes masculinity, crucially, as 'a set of habits, traditions and beliefs historically associated with being a man' (Perry, 2017: 4). This definition describes masculinity more as a historical social construction (which society 'associates' with manhood) than someone's intrinsic qualities or attributes. Perry's definition aligns with Judith Butler's argument in her landmark text *Gender Trouble* (1990), that gender is performative (Butler, 1990: 25). This means gender, and therefore masculinity, is a social construct, continuously evolving and performed through gestures, behaviours, verbal and non-verbal actions rather than being intrinsic to our nature. This article treats masculinity as performative and therefore operates under the assumption that society's ideas of masculinity are malleable. Can society change and is society now changing its idea of what it means to be a man? Can rap music help symbiotically inform – while being informed by – society's expectations of gender?

Hyper-masculinity

If we adhere to Butler's theory that gender is performative, we can define 'hyper-masculinity' as an exaggerated performance of masculinity. Where displays of strength, self-sufficiency and power are considered masculine, evidence of vulnerability is frequently perceived as a sign of weakness (White, 2011). Hyper-masculinity is therefore often used as a tool by which to assert or emphasise one's strength. bell hooks states 'today's gangsta rap invites black males to adopt a cool pose, to front and fake it, to mask true feelings' (hooks, 2004: 139). In the context of rap this may constitute exaggerated displays of physical strength, social power, threats of violence and aggression or an emphasis on heterosexual sexual activity and control over women (Boakye, 2017).

Black masculinity

'Masculinity' is frequently explored in the media from a white perspective. Black masculinity becomes more complex because this specific intersection of race and gender is frequently portrayed using negative attributes, which can lead to unhelpful stereotypes. Examples include the presentation of black men in the media as more aggressive, hypersexual, misogynistic and less intelligent than their white counterparts (hooks, 2004; Staples, 1982). Representations of black masculinity are frequently one dimensional, stereotypical and negative, which has dangerous real-life consequences. Frequently, hip-hop culture is accused of perpetuating these negative connotations of black masculinity (hooks, 2004; White, 2011; Staples, 1982). I argue in this article that some rappers are beginning to show more vulnerability and therefore alter the perpetuation of negative portrayals of black masculinity in rap music. This is notable for black masculinity as it contributes to an increasingly multifaceted representation and understanding of black men both in rap and in society at large.

Literature review

Modern masculinity

Grayson Perry's *The Descent of Man* (2017) explores various features of modern-day masculinity, with one such element being male emotional literacy and some of the reasons men, on the whole, suffer from mental health difficulties more than women. He cites perceived notions that men are self-sufficient and societal pressures as reasons for men not feeling comfortable speaking out when experiencing a mental health difficulty. Perry – who as a cross-dresser does not conform to the societal rules of his gender – suggests that the 'downplaying of [men's] emotional complexity is, I think, the aspect of masculinity that we most urgently need to change' (Perry, 2017: 109). This line of argument is further expanded upon within this article.

Rap and masculinity

Scholars who have worked in this area include Miles White, who explores the ways in which rap has 'had a transfiguring effect on contemporary constructions of masculine performance over the last 25 years or so for males of all racial and ethnic groups' (White, 2011: 4). This idea is explored in this article, and further still I emphasise his argument that rap can be redemptive and cause positive social change. When considering his argument that rap plays a large role in influencing ideas about modern masculinity, I agree and posit that rap might be able to help redefine masculinity in a healthier way which is discussed throughout this article.

The effects of rap's hyper-masculinity on its consumers have been the focus of a reasonably large amount of scholarly enquiry. Critics such as bell hooks (2003) berate rap's misogyny and the implications it has for women, but also investigate the ways in which this expectation of masculinity impacts young black men: 'This media teaches young black males that the patriarchal man is a predator, that only the strong and the violent survive' (hooks, 2013: 26). Similarly, this article further examines the impact of rap's depiction of masculinity on its male consumers, though it argues that over the last few years rap's impact might have become increasingly positive.

Rap and nihilism

The topic of nihilism and death in rap has been linked to the disadvantages faced by its artists who are typically poorer, inner-city black men. Michael Ralph's fascinating 2006 study links rappers' fascination with death to their own morbid belief that they should already have died. He suggests that rappers perceive themselves as experiencing 'surplus time: the sense that, according to perceived life expectancies, these rappers should already be dead' (Ralph, 2006: 1). He later cites The Notorious B.I.G.'s album *Ready to Die* (1994) as an example of this. This article also explores this album and its references to death further in the section dealing with the 1990s. However, this article sits in opposition to Ralph's theory due to his argument that rappers' reckless behaviour is a way of 'seizing the moment' and 'squeezing as much fun out of it' due to the fear they are essentially living on borrowed time (Ralph, 2006: 79). Instead, I argue throughout the article that the dangerous behaviours displayed by artists constitute coping mechanisms rather than just indulgences in acts of hedonism.

Charis Kubrin (2006) looks at the ways in which nihilism in rap might stem from the disadvantaged lives of inner-city black men, who have been disproportionately affected over time by structural and institutional changes like criminal justice policy (Kubrin, 2006: 436) and economic restructuring (Kubrin, 2006: 436). She links this to the idea that young inner-city black men often adopt a 'street code' in order to impress their peers, given that they have few legitimate means by which to impress each other. 'Street code' is described as a set of behaviours which are performed for peers, offering 'these young men a rare opportunity to gain and maintain status, most frequently by engaging in dangerous behaviors' (Kubrin, 2006: 440). Kubrin goes on to explain how 'many who adopt the street code also express a lack of fear of death […] as a way to express toughness' (Kubrin, 2006: 441). The notion of nihilism being used as method to increase one's status symbol is valid; this article indeed views nihilism as a method by which artists conceal their vulnerability. However, I discuss nihilism less as a method by which artists can actively 'express toughness' and more as a passive, unintentional by-product which occurs when artists try to hide their vulnerability – a notion most clearly supported by the works of Moya Bailey.

Moya Bailey (2013) suggests that nihilism is caused by an overabundance of negative emotions which due to masculine expectations, cannot be shared among peers. She presents the term 'homolatency' to describe the specific type of homosocial relationships prevalent in hip-hop, and the ways in which the interactions between men in hip-hop are informed by the rigidity of the performance of masculinity. She suggests 'black men are experiencing intense emotions that threaten to leak out in ways that harm the people closest to them' (Bailey, 2013: 195). The 'latency' element of 'homolatency' therefore refers to hip-hop artists' 'repressed and thus pressurized power' (Bailey, 2013: 188) stemming from their overabundance of emotion which cannot be expressed due to patriarchal expectations of men. She suggests that homolatency might be a contributing factor towards why hip-hop often contains themes of excessive nihilism, depression, misogyny and violence; these are the ways in which rappers' overwhelming emotions materialise. To this end, this article supports this idea in the section dealing with the years 2000–09, suggesting that sometimes an overabundance of emotional distress with no output can lead to nihilism and mental paralysis. Bailey's argument also suggests that nihilist negativity experienced in a tribal group, rather than experienced alone, can create a generative space capable of transforming the hegemonic conditions of patriarchal authority. To this end, I argue in the section dealing with the years 2010–18 that this generative space might have even developed further to create a space where rappers are free to talk revealingly and healthily about mental health issues which Bailey suggests are 'latent' behind hip-hop's nihilistic mask.

Conclusion

This article looks to fill the gaps in the existing literature by furthering the above research into nihilism and mental health issues. I do this by exploring how rap's hyper-masculine expectations may be evolving, and how this might be impacting the way in which mental health issues and coping mechanisms are discussed in and around the music. Are rappers still experiencing Bailey's homolatency, stifling their pain and therefore acting out – or are they instead beginning to open up and speak out about their own intense emotions truthfully and honestly? More than this, could some mainstream rap even be starting to actively promote healthy coping mechanisms for mental health issues? Virtually no academic study examines the coping mechanisms that rap has presented for mental health issues specifically in the context of them as coping mechanisms; Ralph, for example, sees rappers' irresponsible actions as indulgent and hedonistic rather than ways of coping. My work aims to fill this gap, tracing the ideas of rap and society's changing ideas of masculinity and highlighting how these changes are impacting rap's discussions of feelings, and promotion of healthy coping mechanisms for mental distress.

Methodology

I used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Given that I wanted to examine the changing nature of discussions around mental health and masculinity over time, I felt it best appropriate to split my sections chronologically, with each section representing a different decade.

In order to examine each decade's general trends in rap music's discussions of masculinity and mental health, I listened to a wealth of music. I firstly consulted the Recording Industry Association of America's (RIAA) website. The RIAA is generally respected as the leading company providing market sales figures and recording statistics in the USA. According to its website, 'nearly 85% of all legitimate recorded music produced and sold in the United States is created, manufactured or distributed by RIAA members' (RIAA, 2018). Using their search filters, I was able to obtain a list of albums which were both released and certified *at least* gold (meaning gold, platinum or multi-platinum) between 1 January 1990 and the present day (at the time of writing 5 May 2018). In the USA, gold albums are albums which have sold over 500,000 units and platinum albums over 1 million units; I therefore concluded that this was a helpful indicator that the album had been commercially successful and reached a large number of people. From the list of these albums, I then identified which ones were considered rap albums by searching the artist in three streaming services: Spotify, Apple Music and Tidal. Each streaming service offers detailed information about an artist and which genres their music belongs to. I used three services in order to cross-examine the information. I was therefore able to identify the artist or artists' precise music genre. Any albums where the genre contained the words 'rap' or 'hip-hop' were included in my shortlist of the highest-selling American rap albums from 1990 to the present day.

I also wanted to include albums by UK artists, in order to compare the differences or similarities between the evolution of mental health narratives in American and UK rap to see whether they were similar. The British equivalent of the RIAA is the British Phonographic Industry (BPI). Using its website, I compiled a similar list of gold- and platinum-selling albums (in the UK, this constitutes any albums that have sold over 100,000 or 300,000 units respectively). Again, I considered this to be a helpful indicator of the albums' commercial success. I repeated the steps taken to separate out the rap albums from other genres using the search function on Spotify, Apple Music and Tidal. I now had a list of the UK and USA's top-selling rap albums from 1990 to the present day. This list contained over 200 albums spanning the three decades.

In order to make my sample size smaller to analyse effectively, I split the list of albums into three smaller lists ordered by their decade of release and then randomly selected 15 albums from each decade as my sample. I was left with 45 albums which I then began the process of analysing. I listened to each album through, with the lyrics of each song on a computer screen in front of me. I made a note of the general themes of each song on the album and then listened again to the ones which I thought contained themes of mental distress and coping mechanisms. On a second listen of these songs, I highlighted and annotated lyrics containing some of the most commonly found symptoms of mental health issues as taken from the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These themes included: feelings of sadness, confusion and irritability, extreme guilt, paranoia, anxiety, delusions, depression, psychosis, anger and feelings of vulnerability. I then highlighted any discussion of coping mechanisms in the song. Coping mechanisms refer to a person's mental and behavioural efforts to minimise the impact of stress on their physical and emotional wellbeing (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). I colour-coded these coping mechanisms into what I termed 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' coping mechanisms, which I defined in a similar manner to definitions of active and passive coping mechanisms (Billings and Moos, 1981). Unhealthy coping mechanisms (some of which aligned with the definition of passive coping) constituted strategies which might hurt the speaker or those around them, including but not limited to: suicide, self-harm, substance abuse of drugs or alcohol, violence against others and criminal activity. Healthy coping mechanisms (usually more in line with the definition of active coping) constituted mechanisms that appeared to aid the long-term recovery of the speaker. These included mentions of therapy, religion, charities or helplines, prescribed medication, positive mental attitude, affirmations of one's worth, meditation and mindfulness. I noticed that some of the coping mechanisms mentioned in songs from the 2000–09 period did not fit neatly into my healthy or unhealthy categories and so I created a third: neutral coping mechanisms. These were characterised by their lack of activity and ruminative nature. They neither helped the speaker's recovery nor did they make their situation considerably worse in the same manner as self-destructive behaviour did. They included activities such as sleeping, daydreaming and ruminating on emotional distress. From here I was able to deduce general themes in discussions of mental health issues and associated coping mechanisms in rap music from each decade.

Once my themes were established, I selected a small number of songs or albums which I felt most accurately encapsulated rap's discussions of mental health from that decade. These songs or albums would be discussed and mentioned generally in each section to help support my argument.

I wanted to focus specifically on one song from each decade in order to analyse forensically the minutiae of how the theme was portrayed lyrically in the song. Although mainstream media often discredits rap as serious literature, Adam Bradley suggests that 'rap challenges this objection by crafting [...] the most scrupulously formed poetry today' (Bradley, 2009: xvi). As such, I wanted to analyse rap lyrics like poems by giving quotations, citing line references and exploring literary devices used. Out of the handful of songs I chose as representative of each decade, I selected one for each decade which I felt encompassed a few important criteria: it was well representative of the trends I had established, it had potential for interesting lyrical analysis (complex lyrics using a range of literary devices), and it had experienced high levels of exposure (through either exceptionally high record sales, notable public performances, receiving prestigious awards or positive critical acclaim). This last criterion was fundamental to me as it determined whether the song had the potential to influence the culture of masculinity and mental health on a larger, more permeating scale. I investigated the levels of exposure a song had through my own knowledge, press releases, newspaper articles, music magazine articles and forum sites. Using these criteria, I eventually settled on three songs which incidentally spanned across hip-hop, specifically gangsta rap and grime, providing a range of American and UK rap. I then began the process of analysing these songs in further depth and crafting my sections accordingly.

Throughout the process of researching, I was also in conversation with two interviewees who helped to provide qualitative research. I conducted personal interviews with Solomon OB (2016's National Poetry Slam champion), and Elias Williams, founder of MANDEM.com (an online platform engaging with social issues pertaining to young men of colour). The findings from these interviews were incorporated into the body of the article and transcripts of these interviews can be found in the appendix.

1990–1999: The Notorious B.I.G.'s 'Suicidal Thoughts' and rap's self-destructive ideation

The 1990s saw American 'gangsta' rap popularised. Gritty and confrontational, it contained themes of hyper-masculine posturing perhaps more than any other genre of rap prior or since, with up to 93 per cent of its lyrics containing themes of violence (Herd, 2009). Mainstream media condemned its copious promotion of violence, drugs, crime and sex (White, 2011). It is therefore perhaps surprising to note that many rappers, including Jay-Z and DMX, openly discussed their mental distress, defying the culture's expectations of stoic masculinity. Yet, despite some rappers showing such vulnerability, the coping mechanisms gangsta rap promoted for dealing with mental health issues were often violent and self-destructive, like self-harm or substance abuse. This potentially stemmed from gangsta rap's trope of violence being used as a method to resolve problems or feuds – only now this aggression was directed towards oneself. For example, Geto Boys' 'Mind Playing Tricks on Me' (1991) contains the lyric 'I often drift while I drive / Havin' fatal thoughts of suicide' (ll. 57–58), while Tupac's suicidal urges are revealed in 'So Many Tears' (1995). Elsewhere, healthier coping mechanisms such as therapy were presented as not only futile but damaging; Rap group Heltah Skeltah's 'Therapy' (1996) chronicles a disturbing therapy session between 'Dr. Killpatient' (l. 4) – portrayed in the song's music video with comically oversized glasses – and his vulnerable patient who is ridiculed and falsely accused of being a drug addict.

The Notorious B.I.G.'s 'Suicidal Thoughts' (*Ready to Die*, 1994) epitomises gangsta rap's presentations of mental health issues and associated coping mechanisms. *Ready to Die* depicts emotional vulnerability which is only overcome through self-destruction; beginning with a re-enactment of Biggie's own birth ('Intro'), it becomes progressively morbid ('Everyday Struggle'), before ending with his imagined suicide ('Suicidal Thoughts'). In 'Suicidal Thoughts', the theme of violence against the self is palpable, with Biggie describing his suicidal ideation explicitly: 'I just want to slit my wrists and end this bullshit' (l. 27). This graphic description of suicide is unmistakably masculine. Though women on average attempt suicide more frequently, it has been suggested that men's use of more physically destructive, violent methods causes them to have much higher rates of completed suicide (Ellis *et al.*, 2008: 387).

'Suicidal Thoughts' is a short song; Biggie's single verse, stream-of-consciousness style rap comprises only 1 minute 44 seconds. Without a hook, chorus or melody, every nuance in the verse's form, rhythm and rhyme scheme is loaded with significance. Biggie's flow (the way his voice's rhythm interacts with the song's beat) emphasises his paranoia: 'Crime after crime, from drugs to extortion. I know / my mother wish she got a fucking abortion' (ll. 18–19). Biggie's delivery causes the start of the second sentence to fall on the last beat of the previous bar, rather than the first beat of the next. This enjambment emphasises 'I know', stressing Biggie's paranoia about his mother's hatred of him. Later, his squeezing of 14 syllables into one bar and repetition of 'forgive me' in 'forgive me for my disrespect, forgive me for my lies' (l. 24) highlights his desperation and determination to plead for forgiveness. Peter Shapiro suggests Biggie represents 'a hard-core sensibility tempered by a remorseful pathos' (Shapiro, 2005: 281). The pathos listeners feel arguably stems from Biggie's excessive guilt in 'Suicidal Thoughts', incidentally also a symptom of many depressive disorders as described in the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The rap's rhyme scheme emphasises the building of Biggie's guilt and suicidal urges as the song progresses. The first half of the verse is comprised of rhyming couplets, which, as Adam Bradley explains, are 'the most common rhyme scheme in old school rap' (Bradley, 2009: 50). However, in l. 23 ('I wonder if I died, would tears come to her eyes?'), Biggie introduces an imperfect internal rhyme – the stacking of two rhymes into one line conveying a build in pressure and urgency. This idea is furthered by ll. 29–30; the perfect masculine internal rhymes 'bed/red/dead/head' help portray how 'the stress is building up' (l. 30) and Biggie's suicidal urges are increasing. Finally, when four internal rhymes are used again ('I reach my peak, I can't speak / Call my nigga Chic, tell him that my will is weak', ll. 44–45), the brevity of the clauses combined with the accumulation of internal rhymes sees the momentum increase to the point of unsustainability. Indeed, there is a sudden release in pressure as l. 47 ('Matter of fact, I'm sick of talking') is cut short at three beats rather than four, and a gunshot and slowing heartbeat are heard (2:26). Biggie thus presents suicide as a viable option for when life becomes unbearable, by depicting an unsustainable building of pressure through his accumulation of internal rhymes.

It is crucial to note that lyrically, suicide is not only presented as one option, but the only one. Biggie portrays alternative coping mechanisms as futile through P. Diddy's unsympathetic ad-libs. The track begins with a telephone ringing (0:06), and Diddy's voice is heard distorted and echoing, emphasising his distance from Biggie both physically and emotionally. He acts like an interlocutor in a dramatic monologue, his role at the end of the telephone merely enabling Biggie's monologue, rather than providing help in any way. Diddy's lack of impact on Biggie's final decision stems from his unsympathetic reactions. White explains how gangsta rappers viewed vulnerability as 'an emotional state reserved for their feminine counterparts' (White, 2011: 73). This is epitomised in Diddy's dismissive responses to Biggie's admission of suicidal thoughts.

'What the fuck is wrong with you?' (l. 6) and 'Get a hold of yourself!' (l. 21) are particularly poignant, as they typify the responses men often receive when attempting to seek help for mental health issues. Even when Diddy realises the severity of Biggie's distress (l. 32), he is too late to help.

Whether intentionally or not, through presenting a completed suicide at the end of an album called *Ready to Die*, and implying that speaking out is futile, Biggie presents suicide as the only viable solution for those suffering psychological distress. Diddy's ad-libs highlight how rap culture had not yet fostered empathy surrounding mental health issues. Even the recording engineer for 'Suicidal Thoughts' has since described laughing at the sound Biggie made by falling to the floor in order to capture the thud of his dead body (heard at 2:26) (Matthews, 2004). This typifies how underdeveloped 1990s rap culture was in terms of healthy discussions of mental health and suicide.

Overall, though social posturing and braggadocio undeniably played a huge role in 1990's gangsta rap, there were some artists addressing mental health issues such as paranoia, regret and suicidal thoughts in their music. Unfortunately, these narratives of vulnerability were frequently accompanied by the promotion of violent and unhealthy coping strategies, like substance abuse, drink-driving and violence against the self or others; this was due in part to the violent expectations of hyper-masculinity perpetuated by rap culture. Even when reaching out for support (as in 'Suicidal Thoughts'), an apathetic (even judgemental) culture hinders the accessibility of help.

2000–2009: Dizzee Rascal's 'Sittin' Here' and rap's psychological paralysis

The start of the new millennium arguably saw a slight evolution in the representations of masculinity and mental health issues in rap music. Much of American hip-hop continued to promote violent behaviour with it being used – I would argue – as a coping mechanism. One fascinating study by Michael Ralph during this decade (2006) links rappers' fascination with death and self-destructive behaviour to their own morbid belief that they are experiencing 'surplus time' – 'the sense that, according to perceived life expectancies, these rappers should already be dead' (Ralph, 2006: 1). However, Ralph postulates that these displays of reckless behaviour are a merely a way for artists to 'seize the moment and squeeze as much fun as possible out of it' (Ralph, 2006: 79). I would argue, instead, that the dangerous behaviours narrated by artists frequently constitute coping mechanisms rather than just rappers attempting to indulge in acts of lawless hedonism. This argument can be supported by the way in which some artists depict their actions as dangerous and unhelpful. Nas's 'Drunk by Myself' (2002), for example, focuses on Nas driving 'drunk by myself, gun under my seat' (l. 31). Where Ralph might view this as a lawless pursuit of 'fun', Nas admits that 'the more I drink, the more I think bad thoughts' (l. 74), emphasising that his substance abuse is unproductive and in fact is impacting him negatively.

Elsewhere, much rap music from the decade portrays a sense of paralysis (rather than unhealthy, let alone healthy, action). The decade sees an increase in the number of rappers sampling songs originally produced by 'emo' or indie bands and popularised for their melancholic or sombre themes. Jay-Z's collaboration with rock band Linkin Park produced 'Numb/Encore' (2004), which borrows its refrain from Linkin Park's 'Numb' (2003): 'I've become so numb, I can't feel you there'. Jay-Z, a forerunner of this trend, also collaborated later with rock band Coldplay on 'Lost!' (2008), containing the lines 'see success is like suicide / suicide, it's a suicide'. Other examples of this sampling trend include Kid Cudi's 'The Prayer' (2008), which samples indie rock band Band of Horse's melancholic track 'The Funeral' (2006). The original Band of Horses song contained the refrain 'Every occasion, know I'm ready for the funeral / Every occasion, oh, one billion-day funeral', which Cudi changes to 'and if I die before I wake, I pray the lord my soul shall take, 'cause I'm ready for a funeral'. Countless other artists similarly sampled songs originally popularised for their darker and disturbing themes, like Kanye West's 'Power' which samples the line 'twenty-first-century schizoid man' from rock band King Crimson's controversial and dark song of the same name (1969). Perhaps artists felt paralysed – unable to explicitly speak out due to an unsympathetic culture, they used sampling to help ventriloquise their own vulnerability and feelings of distress.

While this was occurring in the USA, grime music was originating in London. Cited by many as gangsta rap's transatlantic successor, the media condemned what Jeffrey Boakye terms 'the least palatable aspects of grime – its violence, misogyny, greed, criminality, latent homophobia and hyper-sexuality' (Boakye, 2017: 358–59). Yet grime artist Wretch 32 argues: 'We're writing to escape. If you listen deep into the lyrics, there's probably a lot of cries for help in there' (Collins and Rose, 2016: 24).

Many critics cite Dizzee Rascal's *Boy in Da Corner* (2003) as propelling grime into the mainstream. Despite the album talking about social posturing through sex, violence and relationships, it was book-ended by two emotionally charged songs. The last was 'Do It!', an emotive lament including the lines 'sometimes I wake up wishing I could sleep forever' (l. 10) and 'if I had the guts to end it all believe I would' (l. 23). The first was 'Sittin' Here' – a social commentary about Dizzee's disillusionment with London. As a new artist, 'Sittin' Here' was the first song to introduce Dizzee and set the tone for his album. This was arguably brave; both the album and song's title, combined with the album's cover art, introduce Dizzee as a lonely, contemplative observer, rather than loud, threatening and traditionally masculine.

'Sittin' Here' unmistakably describes mental distress; it is arguable that Dizzee even exhibits symptoms of serious mental health issues like anxiety and depression. His repetition of words and sentences ('I'm just sitting here' is repeated 22 times while 'Cause it's the same old story' is repeated 12 times) suggests introspective dwelling and rumination on past events, often symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013: 164). Dizzee's admission 'I'm sitting here depressed and I don't know why' (l. 43) further cements this idea. As the song progresses, Dizzee moves from feeling contemplative ('I ain't saying much, I just think', l. 2), to observational ('I just watch', l. 20), to angry ('I'm just vex', l. 38). This manifestation of anger ('at humanity' and 'the earth' (l. 40)) is a common symptom of depression in men (more so than women) (Genuchi and Mitsunaga, 2015: 244). Dizzee's agitation, like Biggie's in 'Suicidal Thoughts', stems from the fact he thinks 'there's nobody I can trust' (l. 49), again emphasising paranoia, a potential sign of anxiety.

Dizzee begins to break down expectations of masculinity through showing vulnerability. This is most poignant in the third verse, where he describes his mood shifting from anger to hopelessness. Dizzee admits 'I feel to cry' (l. 42), before instantly chastising himself in the next line: 'I try to pull myself together, tell myself fix up / And I keep myself from bawling but my eyes they erupt' (ll. 44–45). These lines are arguably the most revealing of the song. Despite feeling the urge to cry, Dizzee tells himself to 'fix up', referencing another song on the album ('Fix Up, Look Sharp') which revolves around aggressive posturing. Telling himself to 'fix up' (synonymous with 'man up') therefore emphasises Dizzee's expectations of himself to adhere to the masculine conventions he plays a part in promoting. However, through referencing his own hyper-masculine song, and revealing that even he cannot adhere to the behaviours it describes, Dizzee bravely admits his own masculine posturing is a façade. This leaves him vulnerable and open to criticism, helping to break down expectations of masculinity for his listeners.

Rather than any form of positive action being taken by Dizzee as a coping mechanism, 'Sittin' Here' revolves around his inaction and paralysis. His flow remains slow, steady and repetitive, with little diversity in his cadences throughout. The repetition of 'just sitting here', cited previously as representing Dizzee's ruminating thoughts, becomes monotonous for listeners, pervading the track with a sense of lethargy. His inaction is arguably a coping mechanism in itself; in observing others and 'gazing away' (l. 9) his days, Dizzee does not have to confront his own emotional distress. This is, of course, unhealthy; Grayson Perry suggests, 'we may try to numb anger, but when we do we numb joy and pleasure in the world too' (Perry, 2017: 112).

Yet, we may argue that what appears to be Dizzee's dispassionate fatigue and indifference ironically stems from his overabundance of intense emotions. This is a clear example of Moya Bailey's theory of 'homolatency'. Bailey suggests that frequently, artists' overwhelming emotions cannot be expressed due to patriarchal expectations perpetuated by their male peers, leading to the experience of 'repressed and thus pressurized power' (2013: 188). In this example, Dizzee's paralysis stems from this 'repressed power'; feeling unable to speak out, he bottles up his emotional distress, thus causing himself harm. At the song's beginning, Dizzee suggests he is paradoxically 'getting weak 'cause my thoughts are too strong' (l. 5), suggesting that without an outlet, the burdens of his mental health difficulties are beginning to physically weaken him. By the close, Dizzee is physically weakened to the point of paralysis, repeating 'I'm just sitting here' five times continuously before finishing the song, suggesting he is trapped in this paradoxical state of being numbed by the overwhelming nature of his emotions. Dizzee's overwhelming emotional state, combined with the expectations of him to 'man up', leave him unable to reach out for help. He exhibits Bailey's idea of 'homolatency' – feeling like he cannot articulate his distress due to expectations of masculinity, he is rendered paralysed, with his narrative punctuated by bursts of inadvertent anger.

Rap culture was still not engaging in thoughtful discussions about mental health. Even upon *Boy in Da Corner*'s release, reviews generally failed to recognise Dizzee's psychological distress, focusing instead on his nuanced social commentary (Plagenhoef, 2003). This greatly contrasts the media response to thematically similar grime album *Gang Signs and Prayer* by Stormzy, released 14 years later (2017). Both Dizzee and Stormzy's albums were critically acclaimed, Mercury award-nominated, debut grime albums, featuring narratives of mental health difficulties on their first and last tracks (see Stormzy's 'First things First' and 'Lay Me Bare'). Yet, where reviews overlooked Dizzee's discussions of such issues, this was almost exclusively the focus of Stormzy's reviews in 2017 – even leading him to be interviewed on UK national news about depression (Channel 4, 2017). The contrast between the critical reception of these two albums helps emphasise how relatively underdeveloped rap culture's mental health literacy was in the 2000s.

The decade beginning in the new millennium was beginning to bring about change, albeit at a slow rate. Artists like Dizzee Rascal were speaking out about the complexities of mental health issues and the contributing factors leading to them. However, the lack of dialogue within rap culture and society as a whole prohibited this from being recognised as the open and nuanced portrayal that it was. Artists were trapped in a liminal state of paralysis, stemming from their inability to speak candidly about mental health issues due to expectations of masculinity and a lack of awareness of these themes in wider music culture. This frustration of artists is evidenced by rap songs using samples of depressing songs, as well as Dizzee's *Boy in Da Corner*. Rap culture was still not yet developed enough to engage in meaningful and productive conversations about men's mental health, as the contrast between Dizzee and Stormzy's critical reception highlights.

2010–2018: Logic's '1800-273-8255' and rap's mental health watershed

The current decade has seen a significant shift occur as rap begins to forge space for men to talk about their mental health honestly and unapologetically. There has been an exponential increase in the number of songs addressing the subject and promoting healthier coping mechanisms.

The rise of streaming services such as Spotify (2011) and Apple Music (2015) introduced new genres of music to diverse audiences and helped make music more accessible with their free subscription packages. This increased accessibility has led hip-hop to become the most streamed genre of all, claiming 25.1 per cent of total consumption and 30.3 per cent of all on-demand audio streams (Rys, 2017). Subsequently, there has been an increase in the public's scrutiny of lyrics, and contentious debate surrounding artists' moral obligations. Elias Williams suggests rap artists now 'have a larger responsibility whether they like it or not' (interview with author, 2018). However, Solomon OB has an alternative view, believing 'morality is too subjective to put that responsibility on artists' (interview with author, 2018). Regardless of whether or not it is an artist's moral duty to help promote healthy coping mechanisms for mental health issues, many rappers have taken it upon themselves to do just that.

This trend even extends to rap's most influential titans. Eminem's album *Recovery* (2010) introduces the concepts of his drug addiction and recovery, which he further discusses in more depth on 'Castle' and 'Arose' (*Revival*, 2018). Elsewhere, Jay-Z has spoken candidly and at length about the stigma surrounding men and therapy (Wilson and Miller, 2017; Bonfiglio, 2018) and references his therapist on 'Smile' (2017). Considering treatment is privately funded in the USA, Jay has also advocated fiercely for free counselling in American schools (King, 2018). Kanye West, who previously revealed his own suicidal ideation ('Power', 2010), similarly raps about his therapist ('No More Parties in LA', 2016), as well as his use of antidepressant medication, Lexapro ('FML', 2016). In 2018, he released *KIDS SEE GHOSTS* with Kid Cudi – an album on which he talks at length about his diagnosis of bipolar disorder. In the UK, artists like Stormzy and Professor Green have openly discussed their mental health in the media, with Professor Green even releasing a documentary with BBC1 about his father's suicide and its impact on his mental health (Manderson, 2015). Socially conscious artist Kojey Radical also co-created a short film about the UK's mental health epidemic, ending with the line 'we have to speak' (Luz, 2018).

Other rappers have promoted self-care as a way of improving mental wellbeing. Writer bell hooks believes that 'sound mental health begins with self-esteem. Many black males, even those with the outer trappings of success, feel low self-esteem' (hooks, 2003: 134). This idea is epitomised by Kendrick Lamar's 'u' (2015): 'money can't stop a suicidal weakness' (l. 62). However, Kendrick's negative internal monologue in 'u' is combatted with self-love in 'i', from the same album: 'Lift up your head and keep moving' (l. 19) and refrain 'I love myself!'. This self-love is a positive model for coping with distressing thoughts. Kendrick has also endorsed mindfulness: 'meditation is a must, it don't hurt if you try' (l. 6, 'untitled 3, 5.28.2013', 2013).

Though discussions are generally positive, it is worth noting that some artists still spread stigmatising rhetoric. After American rapper Kid Cudi sought rehabilitation for suicidal urges in 2016, Canadian Drake undermined Cudi's depression, labelling it a 'phase' (ll. 73–74, 'Two Birds, One Stone', 2016). Elsewhere, American rapper Joyner Lucas's 'I'm Sorry' (2017) – which was written with the intention of preventing self-harm –

unhelpfully calls suicide 'selfish' and 'the easy way out' (ll. 73–75). Some artists (such as American Lil Uzi Vert) have also continued sensationalising suicide and the abuse of prescription drugs, which, as Elias Williams suggests, dangerously 'encourages young people' to self-medicate (interview with author, 2018).

Despite some artists continuing to use damaging rhetoric, many established artists are taking a newfound interest in contributing towards healthier discussions surrounding mental health. One artist who characterises this is American rapper Logic, whose album *Everybody* (2017) is categorised as conscious rap (defined as aspiring 'to some higher moral or socially redemptive purpose' (White, 2011: 55)). Logic's 'Anziety', for instance, aims to educate listeners about anxiety disorders. The song's melodic first verse repeats 'everything is fine' (ll. 1–2) and 'now I'm happy' (l. 9). This is suddenly interrupted by the aggressive chorus, punctuated with a heavy beat and change in key: 'I'ma get up in your mind right now [...] make you feel like dying right now' (ll. 10–15). The personification of anxiety as aggressive and intrusive helps to audibly recreate the experience of racing, anxious thoughts; this destigmatises the disorder by making it more comprehensible to listeners and encouraging empathy for those struggling. Furthermore, Logic addresses mental health specifically within the male community with the line 'I am scared, I am human, I am a man' (l. 111). The three declarations are true simultaneously: being scared does not make one less of a man, nor does being 'a man' make one feel less scared. His final advice to the listener is to 'strive for the betterment of ourselves / Starting with mental health' (ll. 129–30). Even the use of the term 'mental health', let alone Logic's explicit prioritising of it, is indicative of rap culture's progression.

Logic's advocacy for healthy coping mechanisms is most evident in '1800-273-8255', also from *Everybody*. Previously, in Biggie's 'Suicidal Thoughts', attempts at conversation were stifled by a lack of understanding, while Dizzee's 'Sittin' Here' represents a paralysis stemming from a lack of conversation. Contrastingly, Logic's '1800-273-8255' explicitly encourages men to speak up about mental health issues. Named after the telephone number for the American National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL), the song's widespread commercial success helped spread awareness of the life-saving service to those in need. On the day of '1800-273-8255''s release, the NSPL saw its second highest daily call volume in history, while Logic's performance of the song on MTV's 2017 Video Music Awards prompted a 50 per cent increase in call volume – the significance of which cannot be overstated (Tinker, 2017).

The song's structure – a dialogue between a caller reaching out to the NSPL and the operator at the end of the phone – allows a clear comparison with Biggie's 'Suicidal Thoughts'. Logic's track models a comparatively more constructive dialogue, with the female operator offering respect and support, rather than dismissing the caller's request for help (as is the case with Diddy in 'Suicidal Thoughts'). '1800-273-8255' also does not end with suicide, but rather the speaker announcing his change of heart ('I don't even wanna die anymore', l. 91). His shifting mindset is portrayed through the ongoing modifications to the song's chorus. The song's effectiveness lies in the chorus' brevity and simplicity – Logic has said of the subject matter that 'you can't sugarcoat it' (Genius, 2017). As such, the first chorus claims 'I just wanna die today' (l. 12). The second chorus progresses with the operator saying 'you don't gotta die today' (l. 38), before the caller finally declares 'I don't wanna die today' (l. 73). The use of 'today' here is worth further consideration: where the caller's use of 'today' emphasises the urgency of his situation, the operator's use of 'today' helps to educate listeners about the first response nature of services like the NSPL. They are not aiming to provide comprehensive rehabilitation, but rather help someone survive their suicidal urge that very moment or day ('today'). In using the NSPL's telephone number as the song's title, Logic directs his listeners towards a source of emergency professional help. Through modelling an example of a positive dialogue between caller and operator, he highlights the service's format, while incentivising its use. Thus, Logic helps to promote reliable support systems, emphasising the benefit of talking over harming oneself.

While '1800-273-8255' focuses on the dialogue between caller and operator, the listener is included through the repeated rhetorical ad-lib, 'Who can relate?', repeated in the lead-up to each chorus. The question is not necessary structurally; its sole purpose is to reach out to the listener. We might pause for a moment to consider Moya Bailey's theory of 'homolatency' once more. Bailey suggests that nihilist negativity experienced in a tribal group, rather than experienced alone, can create a generative space capable of transforming the hegemonic conditions of patriarchal authority. We might argue that '1800-273-8255' operates as this generative space. By asking the open-ended question 'who can relate?' (as opposed to a direct 'can you relate?' to one listener specifically), Logic invites a group of listeners into the space. They are joined by their admission that they have also engaged in ideas of hopelessness and suicidal ideation. Logic purposefully creates a tribal, nihilistic group like the one described by Bailey. Arguably, in fact, the space even evolves further to become no longer one of collective nihilism but of hope. Throughout the duration of the song, Logic proceeds to turn the group into a positive collective space, going so far as to offer advice and support before the last hopeful refrain is repeated: 'I finally wanna be alive'.

As well as creating and evolving this generative space, the song's themes of inclusivity reach further: the use of a gay protagonist in the music video emphasises that rap is evolving not only to tolerate, but also to actively promote people it has tended to stigmatise. By focusing on a gay teenager suffering with depression, Logic contributes to the visibility of a multifaceted masculinity, which is not prescriptively violent, heterosexual and stoic, as previously perpetuated by much of hip-hop. The video's plot enables the protagonist to display a plethora of emotions which are all acknowledged: shame (1:15), distress (1:26), embarrassment (2:25), loneliness (3:35), anger (3:50), gratitude (4:15), despair (4:31), fear (4:44) and love (5:52). Solomon OB argues that it is valuable for younger generations to see artists 'show vulnerability and a more holistic view of themselves as human beings' (interview with author, 2018). Logic's song and music video arguably help promote such recognition and validation of the full array of human emotion in men.

Overall, despite some rappers perpetuating disparaging narratives around mental health, the volume of positive, informed discussions is rapidly increasing. Rappers are speaking out about therapy, medication, self-care and even suicide hotlines – all healthier coping mechanisms which were previously considered emasculating or futile.

Conclusion

This article has aimed to further academic research into rap and its nihilistic themes by exploring the progression of how mental health is discussed in and around rap music and culture. My aim is not to suggest rap has only now begun talking about mental health issues; this would undermine important foundations laid by artists like The Notorious B.I.G. and critics like Michael Ralph and Charis Kubrin who have written about rap and nihilism in detail. Rather, I argue that rap's mental health narratives have become increasingly nuanced as its expectations of masculinity have evolved, with the type of coping mechanisms now promoted being less damaging to the self or others.

Initially, 1990s gangsta rap failed to foster a culture of dialogue about mental health issues; Biggie's 'Suicidal Thoughts' highlights what can occur when someone's attempts to reach out are dismissed. The new millennium saw rappers trapped in a liminal state: rap culture was not yet taking the subject of mental health seriously enough, but rappers were equally aware of the risks of endorsing unhealthy coping mechanisms.

This resulted in descriptions of physical and mental paralysis, epitomised by Dizzee Rascal's 'Sittin' Here'. In some ways, Moya Bailey's theory of homolatency was evidenced here. Feeling frustrated due to the patriarchal expectations of men not to speak about their vulnerability, Dizzee's overwhelming abundance of emotion unfortunately only manifests itself as indifference towards the world and then subsequently angry with its inhabitants.

Finally, the 2010s saw a drastic increase in the discussions of mental health in rap music. Although this led to the continued promotion of harmful coping mechanisms, it was more crucially a watershed moment for the promotion of healthier ones. Solomon OB argues that 'change comes when positive messages become the dominant ones' (interview with author, 2018). Arguably, rap's dominant narrative is currently evolving to promote self-care (rather than violence) as well as endorsing therapy, taking medication, caring for oneself and a whole plethora of other healthy coping mechanisms. Logic's '1800-273-8255' is just one example of songs that are progressing Bailey's communal space of nihilism further – injecting hope and optimism into a space originally defined by its indifference.

Through presenting the changes in these narratives over time, I have argued the case for why I think rap should be viewed as a positive tool for social change. We might consider rap as a barometer for society's ideas about masculinity, with its hyper-masculine themes simply exaggerating aspects of masculinity which are expected in the wider world, such as strength, power and self-sufficiency. If we do consider it as a barometer, surely its cataclysmic change over the last 30 years from dismissal of mental health issues to real conversation about healthy coping strategies might be indicative of the direction in which society's ideas about masculinity are (and if not, could be) heading?

It is no overstatement to say that rap has penetrated deep into mainstream consciousness over the last 30 years. Take, for example, the plethora of products which have been marketed and rebranded using rap culture and its artists: from American rappers promoting headphones, alcohol and vitamin water, to UK grime artists being sponsored exclusively by sportswear brands. Rappers bring with them priceless cultural capital and influence. This makes rap music the perfect forum for remodelling the ultimate culturally permeating brand, *masculinity*, into something more vulnerable, accepting and healthy. Rather than aiming to rid itself of masculinity entirely, rap is beginning to dismantle and reconstruct masculinity's most toxic, restrictive elements – starting by becoming increasingly vocal about dealing with mental health issues. If the most streamed genre of music worldwide is now dispelling stigmas surrounding men discussing their mental health and promoting healthy coping mechanisms, this could genuinely help contribute towards real systemic change.

Jay-Z writes in his autobiography that 'artists of all kind have a platform and, if they're any good, have a clear vision of what's going on in the world around them' (Carter *et al.*, 2010: 205). This emphasises how artists symbiotically inform and draw upon society, both influencing and being influenced by current cultural standards. While society's changing perceptions of gender roles have granted rap the space it needed to begin questioning itself, rap continues to act as a catalyst for societal changes, helping to inform and shape the world's cultural landscape. The surge in call volume to the NSPL after the release of Logic's '1800-273-8255' emphasises not only the galvanising effect artists have on their listeners, but also listeners' need for increased discussions of mental health too.

This article has explored merely some of the ways in which masculinity and discussions of mental health difficulties have evolved in rap. It is crucial that academia now further examines rap's cultural significance and influence in changing perceptions of the topic. While this article analyses the evolution of a more generalised, monolithic masculinity, it is advisable that we now begin to further deconstruct how discussions of mental health differ between distinctive groups within rap (based on race, age, career longevity or socioeconomic background). Are long-established rappers, for example, granted more scope to speak about traditionally emasculating coping mechanisms than newcomers (who need to prove their status)?

Rap's continued braggadocio frequently causes it to be overlooked as a platform for progressive social change. However, its recent encouragement of men to pursue healthier coping mechanisms for their mental health issues is undeniably a step towards fostering a more productive and open culture for everyone involved. Though male suicide rates in the UK are still three times higher than female rates, it is worth noting that male suicide rates are the lowest they have been in 30 years, decreasing at a rate of 3.1 per cent between 2016 and 2017 (Samaritans, 2018). Though there is clearly much still to be done, the evidence suggests there has been a long overdue shift in the way that men cope with and communicate about mental health issues, ultimately resulting in fewer suicides. It is arguably reasonable to suggest that rap will have contributed in some measure towards the ongoing mainstream rebranding of masculinity into something more multifaceted, vulnerable and emotional. The increased visibility of this different sort of masculinity will undoubtedly have influenced cultural expectations of gender, thereby helping to enable the drop in male suicide rates. Logic implored men to survive; with the current trajectory, I hope we soon see more artists encouraging them to thrive.

Notes

[1] Rachel graduated with a first in English literature from Bristol University. Since graduating Rachel has been tutoring part-time and is pursuing an editorial career in publishing.

Appendices

Appendix A: Song lyrics of the three focal songs analysed

i) 'Suicidal Thoughts', Notorious B.I.G. (1994)

*Bracketed lyrics are P Diddy's responses, non-bracketed are Notorious B.I.G.

1(Hello? Aw shit, nigga!

2What the fuck time is it, man?

3Oh goddamn, nigga!

4Do you know what time it is?

5Aw shit, what the fuck's goin' on? You aight?

6Nigga, what the fuck is wrong with you?)

7When I die, fuck it, I wanna go to hell

8'Cause I'm a piece of shit, it ain't hard to fuckin' tell

9It don't make sense, goin' to heaven with the goodie-goodies

10Dressed in white, I like black Timbs and black hoodies

11God'll prob'ly have me on some real strict shit

12No sleepin' all day, no gettin' my dick licked

13Hangin' with the goodie-goodies, loungin' in paradise

14Fuck that shit, I wanna tote guns and shoot dice

15 (You talkin' some crazy shit now, nigga)

16All my life I been considered as the worst

17Lyin' to my mother, even stealin' out her purse

18Crime after crime, from drugs to extortion, I know

19My mother wish she got a fuckin' abortion

20She don't even love me like she did when I was younger

21(Get a hold of yourself, nigga!)

22Suckin' on her chest just to stop my fuckin' hunger

25My baby mother's eight months, her little sister's two

26Who's to blame for both of them? (Nah, nigga, not you)

27I swear to God I want to just slit my wrists and end this bullshit

28Throw the Magnum to my head, threaten to pull shit (Nigga, what the fuck?)

29And squeeze until the bed's completely red (It's too late for this shit, man)

30I'm glad I'm dead, a worthless fuckin' buddha head

31The stress is buildin' up, I can't – I can't believe

32(Yo, I'm on my way over there, man)

33Suicide's on my fuckin' mind, I wanna leave

34I swear to God I feel like death is fuckin' callin' me

35But nah, you wouldn't understand (Nigga, talk to me please, man!)

36You see it's kinda like the crack did to Pookie in New Jack

37Except when I cross over, there ain't no comin' back

38(Yo, I'ma call you when I get in the car)

39Should I die on the train track like Ramo in Beat Street

40People at the funeral frontin' like they miss me (Ayo, where your girl at, man?)

41My baby mama kiss me, but she glad I'm gone

42(Yo, put your girl on the phone, nigga!)

43She know me and her sister had somethin' goin' on

44I reach my peak, I can't speak (Ayo, you listenin' to me, motherfucker?)

45Call my nigga Chic, tell him that my will is weak (Ayo, c'mon, nigga)

46I'm sick of niggas lyin', I'm sick of bitches hawkin'

47Matter of fact, I'm sick of talkin'

48(Ayo Big! Ayo Big!)

ii) 'Sittin' Here', Dizzee Rascal (2003)

1Roll deep alive, live

2I'm just sitting here, I ain't saying much I just think

3And my eyes don't move left or right they just blink

4I think too deep, and I think too long

5Plus I think I'm getting weak 'cause my thoughts are too strong

6I'm just sitting here, I ain't saying much I just gaze

7I'm looking in to space while my CD plays

8I gaze quite a lot, in fact I gaze always

9And if I blaze, then I just gaze always my days

10'Cause it's the same old story, shutters, runners, cats and money stacks

11And it's the same old story, ninja bikes, gun fights and scary nights

12And it's the same old story, window tints and gloves for finger prints

13Yeah it's the same old story, police investigate around the area

14'Cause it was only yesterday we was playing football in the streets

15It was only yesterday none of us could ever come to harm

16It was only yesterday life was a touch more sweet

17Now I'm sitting here thinking wagwan. (Get me wagwan)

18I'm just sitting here, I'm just sitting here, yo

19I'm just sitting here, yeah I'm just sitting here, yeah

20I'm just sitting here, I ain't saying much I just watch

21I really don't feel like moving so I cotch

22I watch all around, I watch every detail

23I watch so hard I'm scared my eyes might fail

24I'm just sitting here, I ain't saying much I just smile

25It's funny 'cause I haven't bust a smile for a while

26I'll smile for a minute, and I'm smiling for an hour

27I'm scared 'cause it's sweet, but it could turn sour

28'Cause it's the same old story, chung intelligent yaps in hospie flats

29And it's the same old story, benefit claims and cheques in false names

30And it's the same old story, students truent, learn the streets fluent

31Yeah it's the same old story, strange, there's no sign of positive change

32'Cause it was only yesterday, we was standing firmly on our feet

33It was only yesterday, girls were innocent they kept us calm

34It was only yesterday, there was less bobbies on the beat

35Now I'm sitting here thinking wagwan. (Wagwan, wagwan)

36I'm just sitting here, I'm just sitting here, yo

37I'm just sitting here, yeah I'm just sitting here, yeah

38I'm just sitting here I ain't saying much I'm just vex (shame)

39I seen a lot of bullshit, wondering what's next

40I'm vex at humanity, vex at the earth

41I keep getting vex, till I think what's the worth?

42I'm just sitting here, I ain't saying much I feel to cry

43I'm sitting here depressed and I don't know why

44I try to pull myself together, tell myself fix up

45And I keep myself from bawling but my eyes they erupt

46'Cause it's the same old story, crazy boys keep getting on my nerves

47And it's the same old story, police don't give me no peace

48Yeah, it's the same old story, friends slowly drifting from the ends

49Yeah, it's the same old story, I've sussed, there's nobody I can trust

50'Cause it was only yesterday after school we'd come outside and meet

51It was only yesterday, it was all love back then

52It was only yesterday, every sunny day was a treat

53Now I'm sitting here thinking wagwan. (wagwan wagwan)

54I'm just sitting here, I'm just sitting here, yo

55I'm just sitting here, yeah I'm just sitting here, yeah,

56I'm just sitting here.

iii) '1800-273-8255', Logic (2017)

[Logic]:

1I've been on the low

2I been taking my time

3I feel like I'm out of my mind

4It feel like my life ain't mine

5Who can relate?

6I've been on the low

7I been taking my time

8I feel like I'm out of my mind

9It feel like my life ain't mine

10I don't wanna be alive

11I don't wanna be alive

12I just wanna die today

13I just wanna die

14I don't wanna be alive

15I don't wanna be alive

16I just wanna die

17And let me tell you why

18All this other shit I'm talkin' 'bout they think they know it

19I've been praying for somebody to save me, no one's heroic

20And my life don't even matter

21I know it I know it I know I'm hurting deep down but can't show it

22I never had a place to call my own

23I never had a home

24Ain't nobody callin' my phone

25Where you been? Where you at? What's on your mind?

26They say every life precious but nobody care about mine

27I've been on the low

28I been taking my time

29I feel like I'm out of my mind

30It feel like my life ain't mine

31Who can relate?

32I've been on the low

33I been taking my time

34I feel like I'm out of my mind

35It feel like my life ain't mine

36I want you to be alive

37I want you to be alive

38You don't gotta die today

39You don't gotta die

40I want you to be alive

41I want you to be alive

42You don't gotta die

43Now lemme tell you why

[Alessia Cara:]

44It's the very first breath

45When your head's been drowning underwater

46And it's the lightness in the air

47When you're there

48Chest to chest with a lover

49It's holding on, though the road's long

50And seeing light in the darkest things

51And when you stare at your reflection

52Finally knowing who it is

53I know that you'll thank God you did

[Logic:]

54I know where you been, where you are, where you goin'

55I know you're the reason I believe in life

56What's the day without a little night?

57I'm just tryna shed a little light

58It can be hard

59It can be so hard

60But you gotta live right now

61You got everything to give right now

62I've been on the low

63I been taking my time

64I feel like I'm out of my mind

65It feel like my life ain't mine

66Who can relate?

67I've been on the low

68I been taking my time

69I feel like I'm out of my mind

70It feel like my life ain't mine

71I finally wanna be alive

72I finally wanna be alive

73I don't wanna die today

74I don't wanna die

75I finally wanna be alive

76I finally wanna be alive

77I don't wanna die

78I don't wanna die

[Khalid:]

79Pain don't hurt the same, I know

80The lane I travel feels alone

81But I'm moving 'til my legs give out

82And I see my tears melt in the snow

83But I don't wanna cry

84I don't wanna cry anymore

85I wanna feel alive

86I don't even wanna die anymore

87Oh I don't wanna

88I don't wanna

89I don't even wanna die anymore

Appendix B: Interview transcripts from personal interviews

I. <u>Interview with Elias Williams, founder of MANDEM.com</u>

1. **How would you define MANDEM and why did you feel there was a need to set it up?**

   MANDEM is an online media platform that shines the light on talented young men of colour, with the key aim of breaking stereotypes and redefining manhood. It also offers a space for young people to engage in social issues and attend thought-provoking events.

   I felt the need to create the space in response to the conversations about the lack of diversity in the media industries. I also saw the importance in men having a space to express their emotions constructively – in response to the negative aspects of masculinity that can sometimes prevent men from expressing emotion. I also believed it to be important that wider society is offered a more wholesome image of what it means to be a 'man of colour' today.

2. **You've argued that the consumption of pornographic imagery in media can influence men's masculinity negatively even without them knowing it. If the media we consume really can influence us greatly, do you think socially conscious rap artists can cause real change? For example, promoting healthier coping mechanisms for mental health difficulties (such as therapy or medication)?**

   Yeah 100 per cent. Young people are very impressionable and today many of our idols are rappers. I totally believe that what rappers do and say affect the decisions young people make today. I know from first-hand experience among friends that the promotion of drugs in rap music encourages young people to do drugs (particularly as coping mechanisms for mental health difficulties i.e. weed, Xanax etc). It's a breath of fresh air when socially conscious rap artists have positive messages in their music and I definitely believe they can cause real change. I still think there's a long way to go, but there's definitely positive messages to be taken from artists like Kendrick Lamar and J Cole. In the UK, notable socially conscious artists are Akala, Lowkey, Kojey Radical + Che Lingo.

3. **What are your thoughts on rap artists often being held accountable for their violent, hyper-masculine lyrics, more so than artists from other genres (for example rock or pop) are?**

   Due to the fact hip-hop culture is now more influential than 'rock' or 'pop', I argue that hip-hop artists have a larger responsibility whether they like it or not. Moreover, hip-hop culture has very much merged with pop music now i.e. you can argue artists like Stormzy are pop music. Albeit, it must also be acknowledged that the violent or hyper-masculine lyrics in rap music are result of the realities and social conditioning the artists themselves are moulded by. Art has a responsibility to reflect reality but my problem is with how unbalanced it is at present. At present, rap that promotes violence, drugs and alcohol receive far more sponsorship and popularity than 'conscious rap'. While rap artists should be held accountable, listeners should also be held accountable. If the listeners collectively decide that they're bored of hearing misogyny and violence in rap, rappers who promote misogyny and violence will be forced to change. We all have a part to play.

4. **Though there have always been some artists who spoke about their full range of emotions, would you consider rap music (both American and British) as a whole to be moving in a more positive direction regarding the discussion of mental health issues?**

   I would hope so. 'Lay Me Bare' on Stormzy's latest album was a bold statement about his own depression. Yet, rappers have been talking about depression and mental health for years. Biggie Smalls had a track titled 'Suicidal Thoughts'. Santan Dave in the UK seems very willing to be open about his mental health in his music. There are signs here and there that we're headed in a positive

direction. The proliferation of independent artists due to the internet is helping loads of socially conscious artists get noticed. Not to be pessimistic, but I still have a problem with the fact that artists like Stormzy can do positive things like talking about mental health while simultaneously perpetuating negative messages in their music.

5. **You've talked about how our system of patriarchy oppresses men just as it does women. In what ways do you think more open discussions of men's mental health might also benefit women?**

Men are the main perpetrators of sexual violence and domestic abuse. By men questioning what it is about patriarchal culture and male mental health that sanctions this behaviour, we might find ways to fight it. Hence, less women would suffer the consequences of our patriarchal violence. (I hope!)

6. **What are the differences that you can think of, between the American hip-hop scene and the UK rap scene, in their discussions of mental health and coping mechanisms?**

I'm not too sure. I'd probably argue that there are not many differences. Hip-hop has always been dominated by working-class black males, and there are many similarities between the struggles and coping mechanisms of working-class black males in the US and Britain.

7. **How crucial would you say the concept of masculinity is to the culture of rap music in the UK, for example UKG?**

There are more women rapping nowadays but the industry is still dominated by men, hence masculinity is a crucial element. Rap is a forum for men to express their masculinity and probably always will be. The type of masculinity expressed will always be mouldable.

II. <u>Interview with Solomon OB, Spoken Word Poet</u>

1. **To what extent do you feel it is an artist's obligation to promote healthy coping mechanisms for mental health issues to their listeners?**

I don't, ultimately. I think what people are aiming to get out of and put into their art varies massively from person to person, so it's too subjective to put that responsibility on artists. I personally feel it's important to fill my art with messages that are useful for people to hear, but that's because I know I've benefitted hugely from that myself. It's good if an artist chooses to do it, but no obligation.

2. **What do you think, traditionally, have been the differences between the presentations of masculinity in rap music and spoken word poetry, if any?**

Until recently, expressions of masculinity in hip-hop have been very one note. Bold, aggressive, braggadocios, hyper-masculine. We know this. But that has changed hugely in recent times. A whole bunch of artists are willing to show vulnerability and a more holistic view of themselves as human beings, which is super valuable for a new generation of young men and women to be exposed to. I think poetry has typically been a space where a more well-rounded expression of self has been permitted. But like I say that gap is closing all the time. In fact, I'm not sure it's really there anymore.

3. **You mentioned when we met that you had found Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' inspirational. From your perspective, do you think socially conscious rappers or spoken word poets have the potential to create real and far reaching change within society? If so, how?**

Yes. Completely. Because at the end of the day it's all messages. It just depends how deeply these messages are able to resonate with people on a consistent basis. You look at anything that really shapes attitudes in society, Government policy, advertising, film, TV and of course music. It's all full of messages that permeate into our culture and then colours our perception of everything. Change comes the positive messages become the dominant I guess.

4. **When you spoke at the Freedom of Mind event, you said 'we don't permit men to live in the wholeness of their person' (in the context of men being able to acknowledge the full range of their emotions). Can you expand on that?**

Did I say that? I like that! I'm glad I said that. Yeah fully. From a young age, boys especially are taught that certain emotions and ways of being are less acceptable than others. We demonise anger and are told to avoid it as much as possible instead of engaging with it safely and using the incredibly powerful energy that it holds in a constructive fashion. The old mentality of 'boys don't cry' is way less pervasive now, but we're looking at a good few generations at least before that stigma dies to a point of mass acceptably. When we live with these attitudes we relegate certain aspects of normal human behaviour to an area of 'lower' emotions and aren't permitted to express them as freely as result. All that repressed energy is obviously going to manifest itself somewhere someway, and then a cycle of ill health will always be present. To live in the wholeness of your person means shining a light on the 'darker' parts ourselves and integrating that into who we truly are, rather than keeping it in the background where it can influence our lives and behaviour in unexpected ways.

5. **Do you think mental health issues are being more openly discussed in rap and spoken word poetry now more than in previous years or decades? Why do you think this is/isn't the case?**

Yes completely. Drug abuse, depression, anxiety, suicide and its prevention, the power of spreading love and positivity. These messages are all over rap these days and I think it's amazing to see. It's the sign of our times. Our society is pretty sick and moving too fast for itself. These are messages that clearly need to be out there to provide balance to a lot of lyrics recklessly promoting drug culture. Just yesterday [20 April 2018] J. Cole released his album KOD (which stands for 'Kids on Drugs' among other things) and is full of positive messages.

References

Discography

Brad, J., D. King and W. Dennis, 'Mind Playing Tricks on Me', *We Can't Be Stopped,* Geto Boys (Rap-A-Lot, 1991)

Carter, S. and P. Pasquale, 'Regrets', *Reasonable Doubt*, Jay-Z (New York: Roc-A-Fella, 1996)

Carter, S. and C. Martin, 'D'Evils', *Reasonable Doubt*, Jay-Z (New York: Roc-A-Fella, 1996)

Carter, S., B. Delson and C. Bennington, 'Numb/Encore', *Collision Course*, Jay-Z & Linkin Park (Roc-A-Fella & Def Jam, Warner Bros, 2004)

Carter, S., D. Wilson and S. Wonder, 'Smile', *4:44*, Jay Z (Hollywood: Roc Nation, 2017)

Duckworth, K. L., 'untitled 3, 5.28.2013', *untitled unmastered,* Kendrick Lamar (Interscope & Aftermath, 2013)

Duckworth, K. L., T. Arnold and M. Brown, 'u', *To Pimp a Butterfly,* Kendrick Lamar (Interscope & Aftermath, 2015)

Duckworth, K. L. and C. Smith, 'i', *To Pimp a Butterfly,* Kendrick Lamar (Interscope & Aftermath, 2015)

Hall, R., N. Jahanbin and L. Rose, 'Anziety', *Everybody,* Logic (Visionary, Def Jam, 2017)

Hall, R., A. Caracciolo and K. Robinson, '1-800-273-8255', *Everybody,* Logic (Visionary, Def Jam, 2017)

Graham, A., N. Shebib, K. West and J. Castellani, 'Two Birds, One Stone', [Single], Drake, (OVO, 2016)

Hendricks, P., S. Price, J. Bush and V. Mojica, 'Therapy', *Nocturnal,* Heltah Skeltah (New York: Priority & EMI records, 1996)

Jones, N. and A. West, 'Drunk by Myself'*, The Lost Tapes,* Nas (Ill Will & Columbia, 2002)

Lucas, G., D. Kraft and T. Wilke, 'I'm Sorry', *508-507-2209*, Joyner Lucas, (Atlantic, 2017)

Martin, C., 'Lost!', *Viva La Vida*, Coldplay and Jay-Z, (Parlophone and Capitol, 2008)

Mathers, M., K. Abdul-Rahman, P. Injeti and E. Alcock, 'Castle', *Revival,* Eminem (Interscope, 2017)

Mathers, M., R. Rubin and B. White, 'Arose', *Revival,* Eminem (Interscope, 2017)

Mescudi, S., 'The Prayer', *A Kid Named Cudi,* Kid Cudi (New York: 10.Deep, 2008)

Mills, D., 'Sittin' Here', *Boy In Da Corner,* Dizzee Rascal (London: XL, 2003)

Mills, D., 'Do It!', *Boy In Da Corner,* Dizzee Rascal (London: XL, 2003)

Okonma, T., 'Yonkers', *Goblin*, Tyler, The Creator (XL, 2011)

Omari, M. and K. Adjepong, 'Lay Me Bare', *Gang Signs and Prayer*, Stormzy (London: #Merky, 2017)

Omari, M., 'First Things First', *Gang Signs and Prayer*, Stormzy (London: #Merky, 2017)

Simmons, E., 'Slippin', *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood,* DMX, (Ruff Ryders & Def Jam, 1998)

Shakur, T., G. Jacobs, R. Walker, E. Baker and S. Wonder, 'So Many Tears', *Me Against the World,* 2Pac (Los Angeles: Interscope, 1995)

Wallace, C., 'Suicidal Thoughts', *Ready to Die,* The Notorious B.I.G. (New York: Bad Boy, 1994)

Wallace, C., 'Intro', *Ready to Die,* The Notorious B.I.G. (New York: Bad Boy, 1994)

Wallace, C., N. Glover, R. Ellis, D. Grusin and H. Mason, 'Everyday Struggle', *Ready to Die,* The Notorious B.I.G. (New York: Bad Boy, 1994)

West, K., L. Griffin Jr, A. Gardner and K. Lewis, 'Power', *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Kanye West, (Roc-A-Fella, 2010)

West, K., O. Jackson Jr and K.L. Duckworth, 'No More Parties in LA', *The Life of Pablo*, Kanye West (GOOD Music, Def Jam, 2016)

Woods, S., B. Simmons and J. Lucas, 'XO Tour Llif3', [single], Lil Uzi Vert (Generation Now & Atlantic, 2017)

Filmography

Bonfiglio, M. (dir.) (2018), 'Jay-Z: I Had a Paper Route Too', *My Next Guest Needs No Introduction with David Letterman* [Television Programme] California: Netflix

Caple, S. Jnr (dir.) (2018), 'Logic', *Rapture* [Television Programme] California: Netflix

Channel 4, 'Stormzy Interview 2017 (extended): Dealing with depression while making his new album', originally aired Channel 4 News, 1 March 2017, 7:00pm. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=nUMyMJayhbc, accessed 19 December 2017

Genius (2017), 'Logic "1800-273-8255" Official Lyrics and Meaning', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOJTg9cL5bM, accessed 10 April 2018

Hayley, W. (dir.) (2011), 'Yonkers' [Music Video], available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSbZidsgMfw, accessed 24 April 2018

Hines, A. (dir.) (2017), '1-800-273-8255' [Music Video] available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kb24RrHIbFk, accessed 12 April 2018

Hughes, A. (dir.) (2017), *The Defiant Ones* [Television Series] New York: HBO

Luz, M. (dir.) (2018), *Infinite Silence: A film for Adidas* [Short Film] available at https://hypebeast.com/2018/1/ssense-kojey-radical-adidas-infinite-silence, accessed 20 April 2018

Manderson, S. (2015), *Professor Green: Suicide and Me* [Television Programme] London: BBC1 Television

Najed, G. (dir.) (1996), 'Therapy' [Music Video] Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjXmT2gQgvI, accessed 20 January 2018

Wilson, E. and B. Miller (2017) *Rap Radar with Jay Z* [podcast], TIDAL Streaming Service, Episode 10 part 1&2. August 18 and 23 2017. Available at https://listen.tidal.com/playlist/b3978062-0ae8-4e76-9c6a-1d4c3ebe28e8, accessed 10 December 2017

Bibliography

American Psychiatric Association (2013), *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed., Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing

Bailey, M. (2013), 'Homolatent Masculinity and Hip-Hop Culture', *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender and the Black International*, 2, 187–99

Boakye, J. (2017), *Hold Tight: Black Masculinity, Millennials and the Meaning of Grime*, London: Influx

Billings, A. and R. Moor (1981), 'The role of coping responses and social resources in attenuating the stress of life events', *Journal of Behavioural Medicine,* 4, 139–57

Butler, J. (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge

Bradley, A. (2009), *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop,* New York: Basic Civitas

Campaign Against Living Miserably (2017), 'Annual Impact Report 2016-2017*',* available at https://www.thecalmzone.net/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/Calm_ImpactReport_2017_Digital_FINAL_Compressed.pdf*,* accessed 26 April 2018

Carter, S. and R. Corral (2010), *Decoded*, New York: Random House

Collins, H. and O. Rose (2016), *This Is Grime,* London: Hodder and Stoughton

Donaldson, L. (2015), 'When the media misrepresents black men, the effects are felt in the real world', *The Guardian*, 12 August 2015, available at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/12/media-misrepresents-black-men-effects-felt-real-world, accessed 23 April 2018

Ellis, L. and S. Hershberger, E. Field, S. Wersinger, S. Pellis, D. Geary, C. Palmer, K. Hoyenga, A. Hetsroni and K. Karadi (2008), *Sex Differences: Summarizing More than a Century of Scientific Research*, New York: Taylor and Francis

Genuchi, M. and L. K. Mitsunaga (2015), 'Sex Differences in Masculine Depression: Externalizing Symptoms as a Primary Feature of Depression in Men', *Journal of Men's Studies*, 23, 243–51

George-Warren, H. (ed.) (2001), *The Rolling Stone Encyclopaedia of Rock & Roll*, 3rd ed., New York: Touchstone

Harrison, G., (2018) 'Sound of violence: inside the world of 'drill' music…the violent soundtrack at the heart of London's gangland', *The Sun,* 8 May 2018, available at https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6235222/drill-music-london/, accessed 9 May 2018

Herd, D. (2009), 'Changing images of violence in rap music lyrics: 1979–1997', *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 30 (4), 395–406

hooks, b. (2003), *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, London: Routledge

Perry, G. (2017), *The Descent of Man,* London: Penguin

King, A. (2018), 'Jay Z says therapists should be in schools', *CNN*, 28 Jan 2018, available at https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/27/us/jay-z-on-therapists-cnntv/index.html, accessed 3 February 2018

Kubrin, C. (2006), 'I See Death Around the Corner: Nihilism and Rap Music', *Sociological Perspectives*, 48, 433–39

Lazarus R. and Folkman S. (1984), *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*, New York: Springer

Matthews, A. (2004), 'The Making of "Ready to Die": Family Business', *XXL Magazine*, April 2004

Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2017), 'Suicides in the UK, 2016', available at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2016registrations, accessed 14 April 2018

Plagenhoef, S. (2003), 'Review of Dizzee Rascal's *Boy in Da Corner',* *Pitchfork*, 6 July 2003, available at https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/2345-boy-in-da-corner/, accessed 12 January 2018

'Pulitzer Winners', available at http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/kendrick-lamar, accessed 28 April 2018

Ralph, M. (2006), 'Flirting with Death But Still Alive: The Sexual Dimension of Surplus Time in Hip-Hop Fantasy', *Cultural Dynamics*, 61, 61–88

Rys, D. (2017), 'Hip-Hop Is Dominating Streaming', *Billboard,* 14 September 2017, available at https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/magazine-feature/7964849/cardi-b-lil-uzi-vert-hip-hop-dominating-streaming, accessed 12 January 2018

Samaritans (2018), 'Suicide Statistics Report 2018', available at https://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/suicide_statistics_report_2018, accessed 4 May 2018

Sashidharan, S. (on behalf of the National Institute for Mental Health in England) (2003), *Inside outside – Improving Mental Health Services for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in England,* available at http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH408455 accessed 13 January 2018

Shapiro, P. (2005), *The Rough Guide to Hip-Hop*, 2nd ed., London: Rough Guides

Staples, R. (1982), *Black Masculinity*, Michigan: Black Scholar Press

Tinker, B. (2017), 'Calls to suicide prevention hotline spike after VMA performance', *CNN*, 29 August 2017, available at https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/25/health/logic-suicide-hotline-vma-18002738255/index.html, accessed 22 March 2018

White, M. (2011), *From Jim Crow to Jay Z: Race, Rap and the Performance of Masculinity*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press