Who is this Black Man?

The Reconstruction of Black Masculinity through Emo Rapper Juice Wrld

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I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities, as defined in the Honor Code, and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College as a whole.

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Introduction

Jarad Higgins a.k.a Juice Wrld, was an emo rapper that caught my attention from one of the first songs that I've heard from him, as what interested me was the way in which he portrayed himself through his music, ideas, and personality. A huge part of why I favored him so much was the fact that he was never afraid to express his feelings, what he was going through, to the rest of the world. When I first listened to his music, I could feel his pain in his songs, and I could feel that as it wasn't easy, it must've taken lots of strength and confidence to do what he did. To me, when he talks in his music, he is speaking from the heart, and he surely wants people to understand that, and support him for doing so. He also modeled his life off of his drug addiction, which was a huge role in his music, and why so many people paid attention to his image. What was also so important about this idea was the fact that Juice Wrld as a black man, was able to do these things, not worrying about what others had to say towards his choices, not worried about the negative connotations that may have been associated with this, which brings me towards how I got to my project. The central idea is Juice Wrld, as a black man, is reconstructing the world's idea of black masculinity, through his music, image, and personality, and is reframing it into a way that allows us to move past historical stereotypes, and craft our own forms of black masculinity by understanding the messages of Juice Wrld and his music.

Personally, my own relationship towards black masculinity comes from me growing up around black men who idolized and mimicked other black men in the mainstream media, and assumed that this was how black men should look and act. Therefore, many of my peers, me specifically, believed that a black man needed to have girls, needed to be tough, get into fights, gangs, sell drugs, in order to fit the role, and if we aren't doing as such, peers single us out, called us girls, punks, and after that title was given to you, it was hard for you to lose it. For this

reason, I was tough, never showed weakness to anyone, and always tried to get the girls, as I thought this was the only way that we needed to be seen as black men. After listening to Juice Wrld, and what he had to say about being a black man, it made me think in a completely different way, from following the "macho man" phase to actually figuring out that Juice Wrld wants us to think in different ways of being men, and try to turn away from what we thought growing up. That way, I was able to understand that we can create our own meanings of black men, meanings that are definitely working towards reconstructing historical stereotypes of black men.

Getting to this project, I thought about the idea of how Juice Wrld is able to show who he is through himself and his music so confidently, and I've found out that much of his confidence had to deal with the idea that being a black man to him meant that you had the power to speak up about who you are, your problems, show your feelings, because it is one of the hardest things to do. Due to this, I thought about the idea that when we hear the words "black man", there are lots of meanings that go into our minds, because we never have a sure meaning, we have just developed our understanding from historical stereotypes associated with black males. However, Juice Wrld shows and tells us otherwise, which will be introduced through the analysis of music videos and lyrics later on in this project.

Informing about the chapters to come, I will begin with a literature review that addresses the brief history on black masculinity addressing different scholars who have had their say on the matter, the idea of the "box", which talks about how men are placed in a box that forces them to play into the historical stereotypes of men, and how doing anything outside of this box gives society the impression that your not being a man. My audience will also see how masculinity is presented in hip-hop, along with scholars's ideas of how it is shown from their perspectives. I

will then introduce my method that I'll be using for this project, ideological criticism, which will help me with developing my analysis to come later. The next chapter will focus on context, broken up into three categories, hip-hop, emo, and Juice Wrld, and they'll also be guided by scholarly research that breaks down the upbringing of hip-hop and emo, them in comparison to one another, along with article-related pieces that focus on Juice Wrld's perspective of being a man. My third chapter will include my analysis of certain music videos and lyrics of Juice Wrld, and it will show how he is reconstructing historical stereotypes of black masculinity, and what this is doing for our black men. This project then wraps up with my conclusion, where I will explain what I've learned, what is meaningful about it, what I've learned from this project, and how it adds towards the more broader discussion of black masculinity.

Literature Review/Method Section

What is a Black Man?

When we say that black masculinity is socially constructed, we say that black men had to make their own versions of a man through their life experiences. I say this because black men were forced to find their own meaning of being a man, as way back then there was slavery. White men during this time treated black men like they weren't men at all, and they always tried to take their will away from them, and ultimately make them believe that white people were the dominant race, white men were the dominant male race. Black men were always looked down upon as bad, criminalistic people who won't do nothing with their lives, anything bad that happened to them was their own fault. However, what we fail to realize is that many of these black men are simply products of their environment. Professors Kate Mclean and Moin Syed reference Professors Niobe Way and Onnie Rogers, as they speak on the contact of cultural stereotypes, stating " a young Black male in low-income, violent neighborhood may embrace a hypermasculine identity of toughness and anger to shield himself from the physical and emotional vulnerabilities of his environment" (Cunningham, 1999; Spencer et al., 2004) (9). We clearly understand here that when people develop these kinds of feelings towards black men, this may be something that they don't understand, and therefore, they wrongfully judge them. Most black men are forced to act this way, forced to adapt this way, or their lives are in danger within their communities.

There was also the idea of how black masculinity was seen through the eyes of white people from hip-hop, and hip-hop movies. Author Robin Boylorn states:

> "the ways black masculinity is enacted on film correlate with how black masculinity is defined, and understood in the white imagination.14 Friday (dir. F. Gary Gray, 1995),

> New Jack City (dir. Mario Van Peebles, 2001), Boyz N the Hood, Juice, and Menace II Society were films that chronicled the lived experience and/or coming of age of black boys willing their own survival in the dangerous circumstances of their neighborhoods while adopting nonchalant attitudes about the poverty, depravity, violence, and hopelessness therein. Unlike the hip-hop films that preceded them, hood films presented black men and black masculinity as invulnerable, dangerous, and endangered, within the limited confines of the(ir) ghetto. Their lives were presented as pathologies and unfortunate stereotypes(148).

We clearly see here that black masculinity is being portrayed just as stereotypes have made it seem, and it's the fact that they have to perform these kinds of stereotypes or they aren't men, black men to be more exact.

The media is a leading role to why black men are associated with negative stereotypes, and it doesn't make it any better that the world revolves around the media. The media over decades have been modeling black people, more importantly black men as bad people, people who should be dealt with. For example, just to bring up the countless number of black lives that have been taken by others because those people say them as threats is a very long list. George Floyd for one, a 46 year old black man, was accused of using a counterfeit $20 bill, and was detained by a white police officer by the name of Derek Chauvin, who placed his knee on George's neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds, to where after George was unresponsive. I can only think about here that because this was a black man doing this, this white officer took unnecessary measures in trying to restrain him. I think of the stereotypes of black men with this, because I can only assume that the white officer saw a dangerous black man, criminal, that needed to be taken off the street no matter what. Another example is Trayvon Martin, a 17 year

old black male who was fatally shot by Geroge Zimmerman, who explained that he shot Trayvon because he feared for his life as he saw Trayvon walking down the street with a black hoodie on. What I believed happened here was the stereotype of a black man, who is associated with danger and criminality, who was shot just because of that. The way that I understand both these instances is that stereotypes of black men played significant roles, where they were killed because of the fact that they were black, but more specifically, black men. When we think of this, we can say that black men then live in this box, one that says that no matter what they do as men, they'll always be looked down upon with negative stereotypes, ones they can't escape from. The box also symbolizes the fact that black men will always be seen as inferior to white men, that they're way of being men is the correct way, and black men just can't follow it because they aren't white. The box also says that black men won't grow up to be anything successful in life as men, as they just aren't privileged the same things as white men. We will always be black people in a white world, and there is nothing we can change about that.

Within the film "*I am a Man*", it is explained that black males were robbed of their masculinity by the white patriarchal society of America, and they felt like they weren't getting a fair chance at becoming men. In the film, bell hooks explains that black masculinity is represented as a "threat to everyone", and it had to be put in check with militaries, prisons, and kind of detention facilities that keep black men caged. We say socially constructed because black men had to find their own masculinity, as white America didn't allow them to share the same kind of masculinity as white men.

The idea of what it means to be a man has had many assumptions, and many opinions among our culture of people. Apart from simply being a man however, black masculinity has always had concern, considering that our world has understood it to be constructed through

centuries of discrimination and sterotypes. Author Abby L. Ferber explains in her article, the idea of black masculinity being reinstructed, to the point that black men are able to create their own forms of being a man. She states

> "Although the construction of Black masculinity has remained virtually unchanged from slavery through the present, it has been malleable enough to reinforce both the old and new racisms. These steadfast images of Black men naturalize and reinforce racial inequality. They reinforce the message that Black men are naturally aggressive, are violent, cannot succeed on their own, are not suited for professional careers, are not good fathers, and need to be controlled by White men. (22)

Adding to the idea that much black masculinity can be unknown and at the same time constructed through society, this quote tells me that black men have the ability to break away from who they were systematically portrayed to be. They have the power to change these narratives, and ultimately, change what people think when they hear the words "black man". Referring back to Naomi and Onnie, they also speak on the idea of cultural stereotypes, and how the people within the culture have either directed their identities from it, or have redirected their lives from it. It is said that:

> "stereotypes are more like cultural narratives than "mental representations." They state: "Narratives are not static—they are continually taken up, reproduced, and resisted in multiple ways in daily life" (p. 26) Similarly, we find that stereotypes are both cultural phenomena and proximal "tools" that youth use as they formulate their identities. Youth, then, are not simply influenced by stereotypes in the construction of their identities, they

> react to them by resisting or accommodating to stereotypes (Anyon, 1984; Hammack, 2008; Spencer et al., 1997; Way, 2011: Way & Rogers, in progress) (19).

Here we are seeing that while many of us are accepting cultural stereotypes as a part of our identity, that doesn't mean that we have to accept that that is what makes us who we are. Therefore, black men realize that they have the power to change what the culture says about them, and therefore, have the ability to interpret themselves what it means to be a man.

`Another idea of changing black male stereotypes comes from Mark Anthony Neal's notion of the "New Black Man". He had the idea that as a black male feminist, he is enforcing that our black men should appreciate black women, their rights, and what they stand for. Addressed by Professor Brittany Slatton and Kamesha Spates he also wants the New Black Man to

> "challenge the most negative stereotypes associated with black masculinity, but more importantly, counter stringently sanitized images of black masculinity, largely created by blacks themselves in response to racist depictions of black men"(xx-xxi).

So, this tells me that Neal is going against what people think black men should represent, and he wants us to have the mindset and mentality to change our identities, and show that we stand for much more than our common cultural stereotypes.

The Box

The way that popular culture imagines the "box" of masculinity is that they see men as violent figures who are all about violence, being tough, having girls, being a pimp, etc.. These images come from our culture, just constructing more and more versions of masculinity every

day, but the ones that seem to stay with us are lots of negative ones, ones where we are seen as reckless, unhinged, the ones who cause the most destruction in the world. In a film by the name of "Tough Guise", Jackson Katz illustrates through the film that whenever we think of "violence in America, we're almost always talking about violent masculinity". The fact that the majority of violence committed in the world has to do with men, this tells me that related to the "box", the "tough guise" are definitely connected together. For example, the "box" contains stereotypes that explain how a man is supposed to act, and the "tough guise" is showing that they must perform these to maintain their manhood. I believe that on a basic level, there are no differences between black vs white "tough guise", but if we dig deep, we can understand that in terms of white men, they were able to construct their manhood on their own, through simple trial and error. For black men, their version of the "tough guise" was historically constructed for them, they were unable to make their own version, they were already seen as violent, dangerous, once they were born.

Naomi and Onnie speak on this idea of the box, explaining "the literature on Black masculinity (e.g., Cunningham, 1999; Davis, 2001; hooks, 2004; Stevenson, 1997) provides additional evidence of the "box" that Marcus speaks about, a set of rigid expectations that define the Black male identity as a stoic image of strength, independence, and hypersexuality referred to as the "cool pose"(Majors & Billson, 1992) (16). This additional information of the box comes from interviews that were conducted, where different races of people were questioned, and asked about their opinion concerning stereotypes. This Marcus, a thirteen year old black male, explains the idea that he believes that he truly is stuck inside this box. He states

> " Like, the, well you're-never-going-to-be-anything 'cause you're in the Black box and I don't think you can do this cause you're Black . . . Like Black kids are always doing the drugs . . . . and they're always doing sports, or always the one that's just trying to shoot

> somebody up, they're always the violent ones. . . . You're not supposed to be a bookworm, be feminine, be gay. Oh yeah, you're Black, you're not supposed to be gay, you're supposed to have like fifty women and get a lot of people pregnant and then leave them all"(15-16).

Marcus clearly tells us that he believes that he is stuck inside a box, one that keeps black men limited to cultural stereotypes, and if they don't perform, they are not black men.

Masculinity In The Eyes of Hip-Hop

Hip hop for many black men has allowed them to carve out their own source of masculinity, and it has been their platform for changing how society views them stereotypically. However, while hip hop has changed the perspective, it also has brought new negative forms of black masculinity, but that doesn't deny the fact that black men have been able to create their own stereotypes with hip hop. In the film *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes,* African American minister Conrad Tillard explains that when black men go into the studio, "they have two people in their head, him in terms of who he really is, and the Thug that he feels he has to protect". Hip hop has said that black men must act this way, be this person or they are looked at as outside of the box, not a man. As hip hop got bigger and bigger, more and more black men believed that these portrayals through hip hop were the correct ways to be men.

Many images of black masculinity through hip-hop also involved the fact that many black men, apart from being men, wanted to make the most amount of money that they could. Sociologist and hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose's take on commercial mainstream hip hop suggests that if the story can make money, then that is what they stick with, it's the image they portray. Instead of making an artist from them "keeping it real", they instead put on the persona of being a thug, pimp, gangster, because that is what is selling, it's what is making the most profits. In

Rose's text on hip hop wars, she explains "The defense of a much less evolved "reflection of reality" argument, as advanced by Russell Simmons and others, glosses over the fact that as more profits are generated from various "takes" on the black gangsta, hustler, and pimp, more artists are encouraged to redefine themselves to fit those molds"(143). She is referring to the idea that commercially mainstream hip hop has a hold on lots of hip hop artists, forcing them to portray a character that fits into the historical stereotypes of a black man, as if it sells more money, then that's what they do. If they tend to "keep it real", they can probably come off as negative to the media, and that kind of image isn't good for the label, and will not make as much money. Images of black men want to be shown for what they really are, people who are just trying to make it as your average white American, and be able to show the kinds of hardships that they experienced on their way to the top. However, more than likely, what we see are the stereotypes that we've been trying to move away from, the ones that are going to make more money in the end.

On top of that thought, we also have to consider the black men who want to make money their own way, and ultimately look like wealthy and successful individuals in the eyes of the world. Lester Spence, someone highly known for his view on neoliberalism, suggests that the "hustler" is the one who is "constantly working, he exhibits discipline, a desire to improve himself through human capital, and the willingness to compete"(38-39).The "hustler" is one who is trying to be successful in terms of the economy, fighting to make ends meet, always ready to compete in this economy, the one who goes for what they want. However, this entrepreneurial view is a problem for Lester Spence, as he explains that there is the idea that as black entrepreneurs, hustlers are moving up into the economy, the other black people who aren't doing the same either aren't doing enough, or its their own fault that they can't have these same opportunities. However, Spence is trying to explain that unemployment rates, poverty rates, etc.

have increased for black people since this idea came to fruition, and it's as if these successful black people are taking away from the rest of their people, making their chances of success much lower. There is also the idea that says that many of these successful black people made their way to the top off of illegal productivity(drug game), and this tells other black people to do the same if it made them successful. Spence's idea of neoliberalism suggests that these people who are building themselves up in this free market are doing it in terms of violence, hurting and killing people, hustling their way to the top by any means necessary. In the text it says "Committing violence in response to violence is an important technology of subjectivity for the MC, particularly given that institutional agents poorly regulate the spaces they represent and about which they rhyme"(36). We see here that neoliberalism is not good with Lester Spence because he believes that for most of these black male hustlers, entrepreneurs, they got to the top by modeling stereotypes, being that bad boy, being violent, drug dealing, and that kind of system is designed that way to destroy themselves(having their success taken away from them because of their illegal actions).

Emo Hip-Hop

Hip-hop may have been the biggest example when discussing black masculinity, but we also have to identify subheadings within it, which is emo hip-hop. While emo hip-hop has not been seen as modeling the true culture of being a black man, the idea of being a man shouldn't be defined by what musical art you categorize yourself with. Molefi K. Asante writes that

> Regardless of the race of the artist, what needs to be understood, first and foremost, is that all art and artists – ALL—are political, even if their politics are disguised as indifference. It is silence – on the critical issues of our day—that supports the system of oppression and injustice. Artistic silence in times like these, is the same as approval. As

> Ngugi warns, "the arts through the use of images, function as a form of knowledge about our reality, but never are we to assume that these images are neutral." (206)

If we follow up on Asante's observation that there is no single formula to being political, then we can better understand and appreciate the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in the politics of emo hip hop. Sarah F. Williams writes that: "Men like women have been imprisoned by cultural stereotypes not only in the way they reenact social gender codes but also in the subcultures, lyrics, images, and semiotics they choose to represent themselves as popular music artists." And, she explains, definitions of manhood have changed radically as "our culture has moved from one of production, utility, and industry to one of consumption, ornament, and service." Within consumer culture, as gender scholar Susan Faludi has shown, masculinity is defined by appearance and all the physical signs of a tough and muscled manhood. Emo music challenged the hardness of macho music genres like traditional punk and rock to allow men who saw themselves as guitar pounding and in-your-face musicians/fans participate in being able to acknowledge and 'talk about' masculinity in crisis, whether due to the softening of men by consumer culture or a feminist backlash (146). Williams also argues that sociologists have long suggested that a "masculine mystique" has produced certain social expectations of what it means to be a heteronormative proper man, "iron-clad, impenetrable, stoic breadwinners—roles just as unattainable and unrealistic as the feminine social roles" (148). In contrast, emo music is "teen-centric" and therefore, does not have to conform to this expectation. Emo performers are men-in-the-making and are allowed to talk about their feelings and emotional struggles as a "rite of passage" (153). Williams concludes with this observation about emo punk that is also applicable to emo hip hop:

> By slowing down and addressing the changing emotional landscape of American men, emo has connected with its fan base in a way hardcore and punk artists were unable to accomplish. Fans of this more introspective version of hardcore still require the energy, authenticity, and volume that is expected of any sub-genre of punk; however, now that the sonic landscape has grown to represent more faithfully the sentiments of the lyrics, emo [artists] are finding that their fans have stopped stage diving, and started listening. (157)

The difference between emo punk/rock and emo hip hop though, is that the latter addresses how the intersectionality or overlapping categories of gender, race, and class, affect the exploration of the themes in that genre. Juice Wrld reconstructs masculinity within hip-hop to illustrate that we don't always have to be tough, and showing emotions not associated with masculinity doesn't have to make us any less of a masculine figure. The ways in which Juice does this is through his candid revelations about his drug addiction and mental health and using his music to model what he goes through on an everyday basis. He wanted to create more awareness about these kinds of problems, so that future generations of young black males would be more comfortable with expressing their own personal struggles, and seek help instead of going it alone, so that the healing can begin.

With that being said, black masculinity will never have a sure answer as it pertains to a definition, but we continue to create our own meanings. As Jasmin S.Greene writes,

> The development of black masculinity has become quite complex, in part because of the pressure to be a black man in a white man's world. Additional factors may be due to the lack of a father figure in the young black boy's life, and the known statistics of black men today that we all so often hear (fewer of them going on to higher education, death rates,

> etc.). I also believe in the positive side of Hip Hop and I know that it does exist. In many songs and through many artists current and past political situations are discussed. Rage and turmoil over the conditions of America's urban communities are addressed. Hip Hop is a major part of American culture. (ix)

We clearly see here that finding what a man means to many black men is very difficult, that they have to eventually form their own versions.

Tricia Rose shows how much of the media attention has been on negative behaviors and actions of hip hop and rap artists, while very little is paid to the positive efforts of the artists. She writes:

> We have allowed hip hop to be perceived by its steadfast defenders as a whipping boy (unfairly beaten for all things wrong with American society and blamed as a gateway to continued excessive criticisms of black people's behavior) and charged by its critics as society's career criminal (responsible for myriad social ills and finally being caught and brought to trial). (Rose 7)

Quoting from the work done by media scholars Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki on racial representations in the media, Tricia Rose shows the impact of such negative portrayals. Most whites, for example, refer to the visual stereotypes of blacks in the media as proof to back their problematic views about blacks, especially as these images substitute for actual interactions between blacks and whites. Therefore, Rose emphasizes, "it matters how black people are represented and what images, ideas, and icons are endorsed and perpetuated" (211).

Ideological Criticism

This method essentially comes from the idea that it will find the values and importance of what Juice Wrld's music videos and lyrics have to do with his reconstruction of black masculinity. Authors George Aichele, Fred W. Burnett, Robert M. Fowler, David Jobling, Tina Pippin, and Wilhelm Wuellner collectively chime in on what ideological criticism is, and it is the fact that before they find this, we have to know the distinction between ideology and ideological criticism. It is said that "Ideology is a generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, transformed" (1980: 97) (272). Therefore, ideological criticism deals with "theorizing and critiquing those processes of meaning production as social and political realities" (272). I understand ideological criticism to be how Juice Wrld's choice of words and phrasing in his music videos and lyrics are impacting the audience's understanding of their message, which I will link towards my interest in the construction of black masculinity.

Author Joel Martin also examines the idea of ideological criticism, and states "Ideology touches people on a fundamental level, moving them toward a particular version of "reality"and their relation to it" (120) . Hearing this, we can see ideological criticism for allowing our audience to take in the music of Juice Wrld, criticize it in a way that connects it towards themselves, and it allows them to understand their lives in the now as they're impacted by it. There have also been ideas of ideological criticism that suggest that the audience needs to "gain a critical perspective on the dominant values that structure our world" (122). Due to this, we're understanding that these values are what allow the audience to grasp reality, and take in what they see more importantly. That way, they're able to construct critical thoughts and ideas based on what they see, and this means, more critical views about the seriousness of artifacts, no matter what they may be. With that being said, this method of ideological criticism will be used throughout my examination of Juice Wrld's music videos and lyrics, and it will allow the

audience to understand his message, and what he is doing in terms of reconstructing black masculinity. When analyzing my pieces, this method will allow me to specifically address the ways in which they're speaking towards this reconstruction, and what this is doing for the audience in terms of how to come across critically analyzing what's going on. Overall, my method combined with the analyzing of Juice Wrld's artifacts is crucial in understanding the roles that they play, and the roles that they surely challenge of being a black man.

Context Chapter

Hip Hop

Sociologist Carl Taylor explains how hip hop as a popular cultural genre that is both creative and controversial, appeals to its young audience, precisely because it "mirrors the values, violence, and hypocrisy of modern culture" (Hip Hop is Now). Taylor explains how negative associations with hip hop art music and art are due to the fact that this genre frequently glorifies violence, obscenity, and "represents disdain for established norms and rejection of what 'decent' adult culture declares is acceptable." And, with regards to the use of drugs, Taylor points out that, "There is wide speculation that all Hip Hop oriented youth are drug abusers or sellers; again, this common belief is a misconception. It is acknowledged that many young people who embrace Hip Hop culture deal or use in the sale of illicit drugs, but there are many that do not." More importantly, though, Taylor points out that while Hip Hop culture portrays some ugly aspects about social reality and racism, "[t]he words of songs created by young people make millions of dollars annually, and this is because they are saying something about the reality of their world. It can be argued that this is a distorted reality, but for the young listener it is a reality nonetheless" (Hip Hop is Now).

The distinction as it pertains to Hip Hop and Rap music has always had different opinions, and ideas about what either makes them different or similar. Activist George Martinez is the first Hip Hop MC to get elected to political office in New York. He is careful to explain the differences between Hip Hop and Rap music. As he puts it:

> Hip Hop is the engine and cultural vehicle for the next phase of the civil and human rights movements. But we have to make a distinction between the rap industry and Hip Hop culture. The rap industry, to me, implies something that mainstream corporations

> have embraced: a few controllable and profitable pieces of Hip Hop culture. They embrace rap and the language aspects (slang) and even clothing. The problem is that Hip Hop culture is not something that was created in the boardroom. Hip Hop was created on the block; created from the struggles of urban life coming out of the '70s, the ending of the Civil Rights era in terms of all the excitement, and moving toward the Reagan era, which centered conservatism and altered the political landscape significantly. The tone of the country was different. (Martinez 196-97)

Martinez describes how Hip Hop grew out of the need of the Black urban inner-city youth to express their voice and their experiences. Unlike Rap culture that was a commodified product sold to white suburban youth as 'black culture,' Hip Hop culture was political. It produced a critique of both the mainstream white racist culture and also how this was supported by capitalism: "Hip Hop was born out of many struggles: poverty, crime, drugs, racism, police brutality and others. The creation of rap music for example comes from folks just saying, you know what, we have no musical training, but I hear music in my head and can make a beat with my body" (Martinez 197). Martinez describes the stages that Hip Hop has gone through, arguing that it has moved from its "cultural emergence" through the "social creation" of community-based collectives and organizations, to a "political stage" defined by the impact that it can make on electoral results (197-98).

When hip-hop began to rise to the scene around the late 1970s, the black community started to see much change for themselves. Sociology Professor Andreana Clay explains that while hip-hop rose, "the 1990s represent a movement away from the Reagan/Bush era that characterized not only the teenage years of hip-hop culture, but important cultural and economic advances of the Black community"(53). The introduction of rap music brought much joy and

hope in the eyes of those struggling with everyday hardships, giving the opportunity for their stories to be heard. It is said “Given the influx of drugs and geographic and economic restructuring of the late 1970s and the next two decades, these stories were ones that were increasingly being “defined by the ’hood, the block, or the corner” (George, 41). Easily said, the stories that we hear within these rap lyrics are representations of their experiences, what they see among their community, and what they experience based on their race. Rap music for many people allowed them to carve out their identities, and create their own paths to success. Overall, hip-hop has become a platform for black people to illustrate who they’ve become because of how they lived, and add awareness to what happens where they live.

Along with this, Journalist and political activist Bakari Kitwana describes how hip hop transformed the lifestyles of black artists who have made it. At the same time, during the 1980s and ‘90s, as manufacturing jobs moved overseas, rising poverty due to unemployment forced many black youth into an “underground economy” dealing with and taking drugs, especially crack cocaine. This, along with more black men being sent to prison, “heavily influenced the values, lifestyles, and worldview of young Blacks” (12-13). Despite the fact that legal segregation has ended in America, Kitwana argues that “Young blacks are twice as likely to be unemployed as their white counterparts” (13) and discrimination continues to exist in housing, politics and in media representations where black men, “whether criminalized in sensational news crime reports or demonized as the architects of America’s declining moral values,”(147) have become public enemy number one.

In “Conscious Hip-Hop, Change, and the Obama Era,” hip hop scholar Murray Forman discussed “identifies a particular aspect of hip-hop’s range of cultural production – conscious rap – in order to isolate one of the more politicized discursive options available to youth in America” (n.p.). Forman is talking about conscious rap as a platform used by black artists to continue talking about new forms of racism emerging since Obama became President and it was seen as a signal that America has become a ‘post racial society’. Even though society is responsible for the policies, representations, and acts of discrimination that constantly villainize blacks, the internalized pain of that social racism ends up causing black men and women to turn to addiction as a way of coping with pain. Sadly, when they overdose or die in drug-related violence, it becomes proof again of blacks being unable to do anything good with their lives. The culture of hip-hop and its connections with drug culture has hugely impacted how we think about the old school title of hip-hop. A big part of the representations of hip hop culture showed the artists using and celebrating the use of drugs in their music. In fact,

> Two of the most iconic Hip Hop artists, The Notorious B.I.G. (commonly known as “Biggie”) and Tupac Shakur, helped spread the gangster image of rap music through lifestyle and lyrics about drug dealing. Lyrics and codes are embroiled with content that shows what Black struggle meant for those coming out of low-income communities, particularly having to resort to selling drugs as a means to make financial upward mobility. (Smiley 7)

What also happened was that along with the increasing popularity of street drugs, “Research suggests there has been growing use and consumption of pharmaceutical drugs such as codeine, promethazine, dextromethorphan, and diphenhydramine because the drug is legally obtainable, free of cost with medical insurance, and perceived as safe” (Smiley 3). Sociology Professor

Calvin John Smiley speaks on drug use, and how it is very common within the black community. He states :

> The 1960s psychedelic rock age became a significant era for drug content in music because musicians began to see themselves as artists and drug use became part of the experience and artistry. Nevertheless, Hip Hop's relationship with drugs is magnified by the intersections of race, gender, class, and respectability. Hip Hop is part of the legacy of the Black Arts Movement, coming out of Black liberation freedom struggle. Therefore because of the politicized nature of Hip Hop, coming from the inner city, mainstream White America has traditionally viewed this art as "bad" or "criminal"(Smiley 95-96).

What we see here is the idea that as drugs revolved around the livelihood of hip-hop artists, and it became a tool for some of them to use as substance to their music. There was also the fact that while the drug business boomed, this would be where much wealth for black people came from, considering how hard it was for them to actually secure legal high paying jobs. Much racism came from this fact, where many white people used this as a stereotype for black people, along with them being criminals, dangerous, and menaces to society. Trying to reinforce that thinking, hip-hop was used to show the world that this art speaks passion and success in the form of lyrics. Artists are putting their souls into what they do, and they want the world to hear their voices, know that it is only a reflection of their reality.

Emo

Speaking to another genre of music, we can see distinctions between these two genres, Emo and Hip-hop. Professor Mirosław Aleksander Miernik speaks on the history of emo, stating:

> Emo's roots lie in the early 1980s hardcore scene after it moved to the American East Coast from the West Coast, where it originally appeared. Three major stages of the subculture's development can be distinguished. The first incarnation was characterized by a break with the general hardcore scene and a development of a separate identity. The second incarnation was a logical continuation of and an elaboration on the movement's previous variant. The third incarnation is of particular interest because not only did it redefine the movement substantially, but also finally allowed it to be fully acknowledged as a youth subculture" (Miernik 175-176).

I argue that we are now in an affective phase of Hip Hop that is an extension of emo-music that deliberately channels emotions to emphasize how the personal can be political. The word Emo was always a word that had many assumptions, considering that many upcoming artists either defined themselves as such, or they were classified as it. Musicologist Sam De Boise explains that:

> 'Emo', an abbreviation of the word 'emotional', is a term both used to describe music which places public emphasis on introspective displays of emotion and a pejorative phrase applied to fans of a diverse range of music. It is overwhelmingly male-dominated in terms of production and it has been suggested that the development of emo can be explained with reference to a 'crisis in masculinity'. This implies that explicit, male emotional expression is historically incompatible with the performance of Western 'masculinity'. (225)

De Boise traces the history of emo music to "moral panics" around the fear of "'feminising' effects [of the culture] on (predominantly) young males" (225). Also, the fact that "the audiences and performers are largely white, middle-class males," makes it a crisis of whiteness as well

(226). Citing the work of Andy Greenwald (2003) and Gabriel Kuhn (2010), De Boise also describes the content of emo music:

> Lyrically in emo there is usually reference to (heterosexual) relationships which tend to focus on existing, unrequited or lost love, as well as other personal relationship anxieties. While emo is obviously not the first genre to focus largely on these issues, there is a marked emphasis on how specific circumstances make the (almost exclusively) male lyricists feel. This particular aspect of the range of music which has been termed 'emo', is markedly different from many Anglophone punk bands who tended to (and still do) focus on 'political' as opposed to 'personal' issues. This is also what sets it apart from 'hypermasculinist' hardcore. (De Boise 227)

Being that Emo seemed rare in the black community, it clearly came as a shock to most people who associate the spontaneous, hype, loving, style of music with white people. Therefore, it was really interesting to include Juice Wrld in this category, expanding this style of music to give more black people the opportunity to comfortably position themselves in that category also.

Juice Wrld

Juice Wrld was an artist that used his music as the anchor to show his life, what he deals with, and his rise to success and fame. When you listen to his music, you begin to understand the kind of person he is, and start to understand the aspects of where he lived; such as his environment, his upbringing, which projected throughout his lyrics. Bringing this new genre of emo hip hop to the world, he asserts that in being a man, you don't always have to play the stereotypical idea of being tough and blunt, but that there are many ways to be a man. Through his model of being a man, he also embraces his drug addiction, something that is linked with his music career, and he constantly shows that he is comfortable with highlighting that he is a

vulnerable man who wants others going through the same things as him to be more open with themselves. Juice Wrld has been increasingly celebrating vulnerability breaking away from hip hop's typical machismo. Songs such as the "Death Race" cut, "Rider", where he sings: "My paranoia and insecurities hold me close / Lay me down to sleep with my casket closed", show how these "wounded young men [were] numbing their inner torment any way they can, but usually with fentanyl and Xanax" (Horner). In a cover story for *Billboard* magazine that month, Juice Wrld was named "the primary ambassador" for emo rap, "a moody stew of hip-hop and emo-rock influenced by groups such as *Taking Back Sunday* and *Fall Out Boy*." The way that Juice Wrld understood emo hip hop was that "Everybody's got pain." The way he saw it, "Depression, addiction, heartbreak: these are human characteristics and human errors they can relate to." This realization has had so much meaning to fans, and music listeners. His style of music goes against the original style of rap and hip-hop; being tough, having girls, fighting, etc.

As he also explained to the magazine, "Any rap that's talking about what you're going through is 'emo rap'' (in Smith). Many of his songs bring up his own addiction to alcohol and drugs. He started with a mix of codeine with soda and hard candy in the sixth grade, then moved on to Xanax in high school, before he started to fight his demons. His music video for "Lean Wit Me," shows him in a twelve-step recovery meeting and ends with the number for a substance-abuse helpline. He explained his music in *The Washington Post* interview touching upon "subjects that people are a) too scared to touch on, or b) don't do it the right way where people can learn from your mistakes" (Smith). He touches more on this by comparing the serious purpose in his music, which was to lead by example, with the toxic masculinity in rap music:

> “There’s just so much trash, you know? I’m not clowning any other artists. I love a lot of other rap artists. But after a while, I talk about stuff they either don’t know anything about, or don’t want to admit that they know about. I could write song after song about jumping on private jets, but the people that download my music, most of them won’t ever step on a private jet” (in Horner).

This speaks volumes to the idea that he blatantly points out that many artists don’t speak out on what they go through, things that change the way people view them.

Although Juice Wrld was influenced by many older rappers, including his idol Tupac Shakur, he explained that though the glamorization of drugs was a strong factor, it was his own doing that made him a drug addict. He also described in an interview that growing up, had had no choice but to be exposed to drugs, considering that his family, media, and other outlets influenced his perceptions about hip-hop culture.``I speak from the standpoint of the true definition of an imperfect person,” he told *Billboard* in March 2019. “I want to be that person that leads people out of the place they’re at. And in the process, maybe I’ll find the key to get out of the place that I’m at. The low places I may wander into or get trapped in" (Horner).

Juice Wrld used emo rap as a strategy to allow a show of emotions, and affirm that being vulnerable as an African American male, or expressing emotions that are typically regarded as feminizing is acceptable. He models this with the lyrics of his songs that cover his drug addiction, struggles with depression, his self-doubts and the fear of being abandoned by those he loved. His emo hip hop opens the possibility that black men don’t always have to be tough, and that being able to express their vulnerability can be productive in starting a conversation about

the challenges that young black men have to face in surviving systemic racism and police brutality, past their twenties.

With this being said, i'm going to use music videos and lyrics in order to analyze the ways in which we understand the message being portrayed within the lyrics of Juice Wrld. With these lyrics, I will begin to show my readers the consistency of how he speaks his pain, and shows who he is as a person. If I use his music, it will be a clear representation of what to expect when anyone hears his songs. His reconstruction of masculinity within hip-hop shows that we don't always have to be tough, and showing emotions not associated with masculinity doesn't have to make us any less of a masculine figure. The ways in which Juice does this is through his candid revelations about his drug addiction and mental health and using his music to model what he goes through on an everyday basis. He wanted to create more awareness about these kinds of problems, so that future generations of young black males would be more comfortable with expressing their own personal struggles, and seek help instead of going it alone, so that the healing can begin.

Analysis

Juice Wrld through his time on the earth has made an impact on the music world, adapting towards a genre of music that was not greatly seen from black men, allowing us to see the black man in a brand new light. His style of music has always been a part of him, along with him not being reluctant towards expressing his character on the inside, telling us “There was never really no filter in my head, like ‘Would it be not cool to talk about your emotions?’ It was never in my conscious, in my head, to tell me not to do that”(CNN). Not being afraid to feel, and hurt to the world gave the world another view of a black man. If he was doing this, then what do we have to say about the identity of the man, more specifically a black man, and is the way people view them not always considered the only way. With this being said, Juice Wrld expresses who he is and what he goes through within a series of songs, which are able to portray images of his point of view, and redirect images of men. Analyzing his songs will allow me to persuade my audience that what he says in these songs redefines our understanding of what it means to be a black man, and allow people to realize that we continue to create new versions everyday.

Themes

Before I begin, I would summarize that we can observe themes from Juice Wrld that highly reflect what his music is doing in terms of countering historical stereotypes of black masculinity, and exploring new ones. The first theme that I would like to address is concealing, which basically means that black men may use cover ups such as fake personalities, false lifestyles, or false roles in order to hide from who they really are. Or even so, these black men are trying to play into the historical roles of men so they aren’t seen as anything less than a black man. The next theme would be acceptance, where we can see that many black men don’t have

the courage to accept who they are on the inside, and because of that, they resort to trying to forget, and block out that form of identity. There is also the fact that many black men have the fear of acceptance from society in regards to showing who they are, for the fact that they would be considered playing outside the role of a black man, and be looked down upon as outcasts. Lastly, the final theme is awareness, where our society has to be shown that these cases of black men not being able to express themselves in the ways they want is very common, which in turn causes many black men to fall into depression, resort to drugs, etc. in order to help them cope with everyday life. Therefore, the more the world understands what is happening here, the more opportunities there are for these men to adjust themselves through society in the ways they see fit their masculine identity. Overall, these themes are going to reflect in Juice Wrld's music, and allow me to show exactly how these are playing such a pivotal role in him redefining what a black man is.

Concealing

This theme of concealing speaks to the fact that Juice Wrld speaks of the idea that in order to cover up the hole that he feels within himself, he needs to use drugs, in order to fully cope with everyday life. This is like a lid that many black men can put on themselves because they are afraid of showing the world who they are behind closed doors. Due to this, as I've said before, many black men play into these personas that reflect the white vision of black masculinity in order to keep the idea that they are acting like they should act, as men. However, this concealing of Juice Wrld is used to show his audience that this is so common in black males, as they need to do this in order to keep their status as "dominant black males' ' in society. Juice

Wrld as he has said before, doesn't tense up when speaking of his emotions, and that is why he expresses his drug use as a symbol that he won't do such a thing.

Concealing feelings deep inside is a very serious issue that black men have, and it's not talked about because it is just assumed that black men must play the same roles as any other black man. These roles happen to be the culturally constructed stereotypes that society has already plotted out for us, which generally happens to be tough, having lots of girls, being pimps, owning guns, criminals, etc. Therefore, if there ever came a time when these roles wouldn't be played by black men, that was when they get called punks, chumps, sissies, playing outside of the "box" of a man. Touching back on an interview that was conducted from Professors Niobe Way and Onnie Rogers on a thirteen year black male by the name of Marcus, he states " Like, the, well you're-never-going-to-be-anything 'cause you're in the Black box and I don't think you can do this cause you're Black . . . Like Black kids are always doing the drugs . . . . and they're always doing sports, or always the one that's just trying to shoot somebody up, they're always the violent ones. . . . You're not supposed to be a bookworm, be feminine, be gay. Oh yeah, you're Black, you're not supposed to be gay, you're supposed to have like fifty women and get a lot of people pregnant and then leave them all"(15-16). Juice Wrld is letting us know that there shouldn't be any reason as to why a black man can't express who he is truthfully.

The audience is introduced to his portrayal of concealing in an animated video of the song "Wishing Well", which was created after his death, and was included in his final album, "Legends Never Die". The video starts off with a solar nebula that circles around Juice Wrld's 999 signature with pinkish clouds, used to set the emotional tone of the video, with which this color is associated with femininity and feelings. As the beat drops, the video zooms out from Juice Wrld's eye, and follows with the line "I toss my pain with my wishes in a wishing well",

which shows him grabbing an emoji floating around him, and he tosses it into a wishing well. Tossing his pain in a wishing well signifies that he is trying to throw his pain in a well, which has a deep hole, that many people won't see, which is a symbol of exactly how much black men have to do such things to keep their image as "black men" acceptable in society. When the audience sees this, it leads them to the idea that Juice Wrld is trying to hide his feelings from everyone, because as a black man in society this is deemed unacceptable to present yourself as such. Also, the fact that emojis are visual representations of emotions, we see here that him throwing the emoji into the well gives us certainty that he is trying to discard his feelings very deep. The video continues with him being constantly followed around by more and more emojis, and him going to a therapy session to deal with his internal problems, with himself as the mentor, to add on to the idea of him having to deal with his problems by himself. After this, we hear Juice Wrld mention that this is the point where he tends to take all of his feelings and hide them because of the fear that he would get hurt. The audience now sees a black man that is presented as damaged by the looks of his addiction and depression, and he must conceal himself (hide all of his feelings) in order to keep being seen as a black man, almost as if he has to lock himself away just so he won't get judged for showing vulnerability.

The attention of the audience is now focused on Juice Wrld showing himself in a different light of a black man, one that many have not been exposed to enough within our modern culture. We must ask ourselves what the presentation of himself through the video suggests about the message that he wants to convey. To answer, he is showing us that what he is doing in terms of concealing his feelings into a well due to the fear of being hurt by others opens our minds up to a more global situation we face today as black men. We must play roles that our world knows of association with black men, or we are judged outside of a man. Therefore, Juice

Wrld conceals his feelings in order to stay unhurt and judged by his peers, which is what he wants the rest of the world to understand. Due to the historical look of hip hop artists, black men have been influenced by other black men who embraced the thug, criminalistic, lifestyle, and have gotten rich and famous from it. It's caused lots of black men to lock away feelings, emotions, anything sentimental because that is how we get called failing to perform the duties of our black men(criminals, tough, impassive).

Piggybacking off this, another instance where we see this idea of concealing is from a song called "Maze", which debuted in Juice Wrld's second studio album. He starts off by explaining that he is stuck in a maze of his mind, where he is suffering from pain and sorrow. From here, the audience gets the idea that he is battling with the problems within himself, and it feels like an eternity. He then explains that he is numbing his pain with codeine(drug-related drink), which then tells us that in order to cope, he has to take this drink to numb his feelings, and try to forget about them. Concealment is present here for the fact that we see Juice Wrld attempting to block out his internal side, where he is using drugs as his cover up, his way of not having to feel his emotions. We now see two instances in which black men try to hide their emotions for the sake of them still being seen as men: simply forcing emotions to be buried deep down and away from society, and using drugs to try to block out those same emotions.

Awareness

The theme of awareness is speaking to the idea that Juice Wrld wants people to have more eyes open when talking about when discussing the issue that black males have with themselves internally. He shows audiences through his lyrics that he is deliberately speaking out towards his addiction, and the fact that his addiction enforces him to even have thoughts of overdosing.They would only just refuse to see what is going for the fact that they don't want to

encounter roles that are played outside of a black man. Many black men tend to get shunned by the rest of the world because the ways in which they are supposed to be men were historically constructed, so it really made it hard for them to carve out their own perspectives of men.

Awareness for Juice Wrld can be the key in helping out lots of people, more specifically black men that either may be dealing with the exact same thing as him, or may compare to him in the idea of not having outside help with showing their true self. The more people that catch on to what is happening can be able to address this more in society, and probably even get help for those people who are feeling like their voices aren't heard. Black men will have the key to unlocking a new space for revealing themselves, and revealing what they think a black man should be, or represent. Many black men on the brink of collapse from not being able to express themselves may be able to get help from mental groups that will allow them to express themselves freely. Juice Wrld is enlightening us with the fact that if he can move his audience in the direction of them being able to be more critically analytical, then fellow black men can do just the same, if they would just open up.

This theme speaks to the idea that Juice Wrld is serving as a tool for the world being more aware of the roles that are presented to us when talking about black men. My reason for saying this is because some may know that there are many interpretations of a black man, but the ones we always discuss have to do with what I referred to earlier(criminals, thug, impassive). Within the context of the previous song, we observe that Juice Wrld is talking on two phones, one labeled depression and the other is addiction, and says "I cry out for help do they listen",which can serve as a cry out for help towards the audience, as it makes them pay more attention to his reference of drugs. For black masculinity, we see this as a huge problem for the idea that black men are stereotypically associated with drug use, so when they hear about Juice

Wrld's drug use in his music, they tend to care less. Professor of Sociology Herman Grey states " Drugs, sexism, pleasure, excess, nihilism, defiance, pride, and the cool pose of disengagement were all a part of the style, personality, vision, and practice of an assertive heterosexual black masculinity that could not be confined within the dominant cultural logic"(401-402). The audience is then drawn in to realize that what is happening with Juice Wrld is a clear representation of other black men possibly wanting to cry out for help because of depression, addiction, and they can't because it is usually assumed that this is normal of their character(using drugs).

In another song titled "Black & White", where Juice Wrld deliberately tends to play on him partying it up, and doing countless drugs before the night ends. The audience interprets this as him having an addiction, but continuously using drugs, and enjoying it to the point that he can't stop. He then goes on to say that he knows that these drugs are hurting him, which then tells us that while he seems to enjoy himself with these parties and drugs, it surely is killing him slowly. As the video progresses, we then see Juice Wrld at his own funeral, with pictures, candles, and all of the friends that he partied with attending. This tells the audience that Juice Wrld knows that he can die from the constant use of drugs, but he still does it anyway. It makes us realize that he could possibly be hinting at his own death because he wants us to be more woke in terms of trying harder to confront the fact that black men don't have the liberty to show their feelings without getting criticized. Professors Aaronette White of sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Tal Peretz of sociology from the University of Southern California states "Through teasing and bullying of boys in school for ''sissiness'' and describing a boy or man as ''girly,'' ''too soft,'' or a ''wuss,'' the association with anything that seems ''feminine'' is repressed as boys and men distance themselves from any behavior that may

indicate homosexuality or vulnerability" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Katz 2006) (407). We are witnessing an idea here, as not performing the historical roles of a black male will cause society to judge you outside of a black male, something that much of our black men fear.

Acceptance

The theme acceptance talks on the fact that Juice Wrld wants more people to accept who they are, and realize that this will only make them more confident about who they are. When Juice mentions acceptance, he is saying it in terms of him understanding that he has an addiction problem, and the only way to move forward is to accept it. Being able to accept it, you are realizing that you can be in control of the situation, and have the power to change it. Juice is giving his audience this courage, this way of saying that what they're going through can be handled, and it will eventually get better over time. Without acceptance of who you are, or what you're going through, black people will be stuck in a loop of negativity which will only drag them deeper and deeper into a hole.

Acceptance plays a very important role in determining the confidence that black men would have in order to pull out their true identities, and recreate themselves as men. Acceptance has to mean that these men know that releasing emotions is what they need to do in order to break away from the historical stereotypes of black men. This will evidently cause them to be exposed to a new life of themselves, a life that has no limits on their masculine identity, they just feel free to do whatever they feel should model a man. Juice Wrld connects this theme more clearly in the song "Lean wit me", where he is embracing the fact that he has an addiction problem, and that is what makes him who he is. In the video, Juice is apparently in a drug rehabilitation group, and he is chosen to tell the rest of the group about himself. First off, the fact that he is in an open rehabilitation group suggests to me that he is presenting his struggle to the

rest of the world, inviting them to be involved with his journey, his life. It matters that he is in a rehab group also because we understand the acceptance here, where he knows his addiction, and he is accepting help from the rehab. Also, being a black man, this rehab group is allowing Juice Wrld to be judged by others, having his business out in the open, seen as a different kind of black man (hurting, vulnerable), one that surely goes against these stereotypes. If we understand our society, many black men don't enjoy discussing their business on the inside, especially feelings or pain, based on stereotypes of them, as tough, criminalistic, pimps. He is showing the audience that he may have his problem, but he is taking the next into helping himself, which is what he says more black men who feel hesitant about such, need to do. Acceptance as a black man is what they need in order to move forward, as Juice Wrld reminds us "Everybody's got pain." The way he saw it, "Depression, addiction, heartbreak: these are human characteristics and human errors they can relate to." Juice Wrld constant embrace of his drug use throughout the rest of the video, and his acceptance of what it's doing to him. The emphasis that is put onto this idea serves as a tool for the audience, for them to understand that acceptance based off of Juice Wrld will eventually provide more black males with the leverage to not limit themselves to the historical stereotypes of black men, and realize who they are, accept who they are. The reframing of black masculinity is very clear here, for the fact that we're witnessing a new identity of a black man, one who truly accepts that they're prone to feeling, prone to pain, and prone to changing what a black man is.

Another instance in which we see this theme of acceptance comes from a song by the name of "rich and blind" which speaks on Juice Wrld fighting through his demons, and trying to come out on top in the end. He starts off by explaining that many people continue to want to read his mind, but the only thing that they'll find is a lost soul that is rich and blind. To the audience,

this implies that he is letting people into his internal side, but that doesn't mean that they'll find much, just a soul that is trying to navigate through his life. He then goes on to explain that he knows that he has a purpose, yet he doesn't know what it is. When we hear this, we see this as an uplift, a way of Juice Wrld saying that he isn't giving up because his soul is lost, but he knows that he has a purpose in life, and he'll understand it someday. He goes on to say that it is funny that the most blessed people have the most curses, and that if another one of his loved ones dies, his heart will break, he'll shed tears for them, and continue to take drugs, even though he knows of their danger. Saying this, the audience understands that he is someone who is blessed, and he wants to do something positive that will touch the earth, and allow his message to help them turn their lives around if need be, while still shedding tears freely as a black man for loved ones that he may lose. The uplift continues when he says that the song is dedicated to those who have felt depressed, and that he can relate, and that is why he was able to face his fears, confront his faults. To the audience, we understand acceptance in this way as Juice Wrld not allowing drugs to take over his life, and using his confidence in order to accept who he is, while redirecting his life based on what he's already been through, and directing the song to the audience suggests that he surely wants to help whoever may be listening to accepting themselves. That strength will inevitably allow people to relate to what he says, goes through, and hopefully give them a second chance at revival of their lives. In the eyes of black masculinity, we can see that a black man such as Juice Wrld is able to identify where he is in life, a struggling addict, one who isn't afraid to accept his addiction, embrace his feelings, which is challenging the stereotype that black men are emotionless, refuse to confront their internal problems, and are just constantly violent, menaces to society.

In closing, the themes that I've developed within this analysis gather the central idea of what I try to prove, that they are correlating with Juice Wrld in terms of redefining historical stereotypes of black masculinity in the world. Within synchronization of each other, we observe that black men have the tendency to conceal themselves in order to hide their internal side away from the society, for the fear of being judged by society, their peers, for not demonstrating the roles of black men. After demonstrating concealment, our black men need to build awareness so that our world can be more woke in terms of noticing that they're dealing with problems that aren't being addressed. Therefore, more and more black men tend to deal with the same problems because society says that they have to act a certain way, or they aren't black men. With this being said, with more awareness, acceptance floats in, where more and more black men become socially comfortable with expressing who they truly are. Therefore, it allows for more opportunities of black men to confront who they are on the inside, and present to the world, their version of a black man. Times are changing, society is changing, and we have to realize that historically constructed stereotypes need to be redefined, and crafted into newer modern roles, roles that allow our black men to evolve into our best selves.

Conclusion

Throughout my journey with this project, I've learned many things about my project, from the many ideas of black masculinity from the perspectives of communication scholars to the reconstruction of them in terms of Juice Wrld. I've learned that black masculinity won't ever really have a definitive meaning to it, we as a culture just socially construct it, and say that this is what a black man should do, or perform. Therefore, that means that we can say what we want about what a black man is, as we are the ones who make the meanings, and we go along with what it means to us. I've learned that there are those who believe that what is already historically constructed is what is true, and when we try to reconstruct them, we are going outside of society's views, but this is what we need to do, as us black men who don't want to associate our masculinity with history get automatically associated as criminals, thugs, pimps, etc. With reconstruction, we are able to understand as a culture that black males need to have the opportunity to be able to carve out our own forms of masculinity, and that means being able to address what may seem feminine to society (feelings, pain), as this is what most black men have problems with.

My work is a part of an ongoing project of a question that society continues to hear, but maybe won't ever be clear as to finding a definitive answer: What is a black man? When society hears this question, lots of us automatically turn to mainstream media portrayals, historical aspects, where we understand how our black men are viewed, and the way that they're expected to act in order to seem acceptable roles. When I say acceptable, I say it in the context of black men having to play the part that lots of us already know fits their character: the criminal, tough guy, gets all the girls, pimps, apathetic. Here, we understand that these traits are what black men should be modeling, and anything that's done outside of this gets questioned, and then judged as

not performing your duties as black men. However, I'm here to explain that being a black man doesn't have to do with constantly sticking to these roles that we understand everyday, but being a black man should be what you think, and what you interpret a black man should model. Juice Wrld lets us know that him personally, he believes that feelings, what lots of men choose to put away because they don't want to be harshly bullied by peers (sissy, chump, girl, wuss), are what our black men need to embrace in order to find another version of themselves as black men. His music is serving as a political intervention, with the effort to challenge and dislodge the dominant conception of black masculinity that is anchored in white privilege. We are understanding this because of the idea that many stereotypes of black masculinity have been crafted from the perspectives of white people who's masculinity was easy to discover, due to the freedom they had in society compared to black men. Juice Wrld's impact is allowing us to see that lots of our black men were playing roles they didn't want because they had no choice, whites already told society who black men were, what they do,and how to treat them like criminals and unsuccessful people. These views of Juice Wrld have had a huge impact on my life as well, considering that I look at the black man in a totally different way now because of him. He has taught me that just because society says that black men are supposed to do this or play this role, it doesn't mean that we have to follow it. An individual person can say that they choose to be this kind of black man or that kind of black man, and Juice Wrld says that you can still be that man while expressing feelings, addressing pain, as it is one of the hardest things to do as a black man, Juice Wrld saying this has also taught me that I needed to flip the script on pleasing others so that I seem acceptable to society, and do what makes myself happy. Therefore, that way, I was able to see that being a black man has so many different meanings, and it is what we make it. Now, I

choose to teach all of my peers about creating more meanings of identity, and being able to classify themselves as whatever or whoever they want, because it is always up to them.

My project adds to this topic that we have to reconstruct black masculinity more than ever as there are our black men who choose to express themselves outside of society's views, but can't because they fear that society would say that they're not black men, they're being girls. This project is meaningful in being able to show my audience what stepping outside of the "box" does for a black man, and what Juice Wrld is doing to show that this box can be reconstructed to fit other ways of the black man. The uniqueness of this project comes from the idea of using a very recent (young) black male rapper, one who doesn't have much information towards his name, but enough in order to confront the present day issue of black masculinity. I believe that other people can be able to build off my work by identifying other black artists who are embracing this emo rap culture, and doing so in a way that allows us to see reconstruction of black masculinity based off their art (music, lyrics, interviews) similar to or just as we've seen Juice Wrld do. Rappers such as (XXXTentacion, Lil Peep, Lil Uzi Vert) have all embraced the emo rap culture, and other scholars can find how their art is a continuation of the legacy of Juice Wrld, and the embracing of a new era of the black man.

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