

2023

Healing Culturally Induced Trauma From Marvin's Room To The Indian Boarding School

Angie Jocelin Leiva

William & Mary - Arts & Sciences, langie765@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leiva, Angie Jocelin, "Healing Culturally Induced Trauma From Marvin's Room To The Indian Boarding School" (2023). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. William & Mary. Paper 1697552572.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.21220/s2-9059-he06>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

Healing Culturally Induced Trauma from Marvin's Room to the Indian Boarding School

Angie Leiva

Syracuse, Utah

Bachelor of Arts, Utah State University, 2017

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of The College of William & Mary in
Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

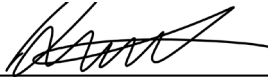
American Studies Program

College of William & Mary
August 2023

APPROVAL PAGE

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

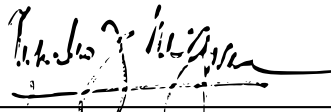


Angie Jocelin Leiva

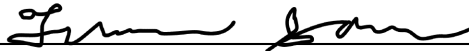
Approved by the Committee, June 2023



Simon Stow, Professor, American Studies and Government
College of William & Mary



Charles McGovern, Associate Professor, American Studies and History
College of William & Mary



Francesca Sawaya, Professor, American Studies and English
College of William & Mary

ABSTRACT

This master's thesis portfolio is analyzing the music of contemporary hip-hop artists and the autobiographical work of 20th-century Indigenous writer and political activist Zitkala-Ša. A close reading methodology is used to analyze all the writing included in this body of work. The purpose is to examine the importance of community building within Black and Indigenous communities in the wake of political and social injustice. This portfolio uses the theoretical work of Audrey Lorde, Sianne Ngai, and Robert Warrior to provide support for the central thesis. All the subjects in this portfolio are writing from a first-person point of view and discussing topics of death, racism, and injustice. Concurrently, the autobiographical nature of both Zitkala-Ša's work and hip-hop music promotes an environment where readers and listeners are empowered to discuss issues of emotional trauma due to racist institutional and cultural practices and gender issues. The implication of mental health awareness is drawn from the examination of lyrics from six hip-hop songs released in the last eleven years. Additionally, the vulnerability of Black hip-hop artists encourages the destigmatization of mental health issues within their communities. Lastly, the scientific findings of the effects of music on the human body, while still new and inconclusive, are used to highlight the apparent significance of music in everyday life. This portfolio offers further insight into the lasting and profound impact of community building.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Dedications	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Marvin's room and mental health: The New Space of Hip-hop	5
Chapter 2. The Politically Productive "Ugly Feelings" of Zitkala-Ša	26
Bibliography	51

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Professors Simon Stow, Charles McGovern and Francesca Sawaya for helping me from the very start to the end of this project. The help and guidance I received from each of them has helped me both as an individual and as a scholar. I am grateful for the guidance of my faculty advisor, Leisa Meyer. I want to also give a heartfelt thank you to Benjamin Crosby for editing my work and for always supporting my academic endeavors.

This master's degree is dedicated to Noe Leiva

Introduction

Mental health conditions are classified on a continuum: the length of time and the intensity of the feelings or behaviors determine the seriousness of the condition. For example, a person can feel anxious without having an anxiety disorder. The severity depends on how deeply the condition impacts a person's performance in school or work. The most severe conditions can lead to substance abuse, self-harm, and suicide. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 1 in 5 US adults live with a mental illness, and over 1 in 5 youths (ages 13-18) either currently or at some point in their life have experienced a seriously debilitating mental illness (CDC). The cause of mental health issues varies, the contributing factors include trauma, biology, substance abuse, and isolation. Often, it is a combination of these and other factors.

This project is the combination of two separate papers that deal with the topic of depression on an individual and collective level. However, the role of race, gender, and social class will be the focus of this project. Additionally, this project examines the productive use of anger in response to institutional obstructed agency. The first paper, which I will refer to as chapter one, focuses on hip-hop music released in the last twelve years. The second paper, which I will refer to as chapter two, focuses on the autobiographical work of Indigenous writer and activist Zitkala-Ša.

In Chapter one, I analyze the lyrics of six hip-hop songs released by five different male Black artists. Each song has explicit and implicit references to

mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and suicide. Therefore, I caution all readers with a trigger warning that this chapter contains references to suicide, self-harm, and substance abuse. Concurrently, this chapter examines the national average of Black men and the rate of engagement of mental health treatment. Black men are less likely to seek professional treatment due to cultural stigmas but also because of cultural misalignment. Many Black men have concerns that mental health professionals are not culturally competent to treat their issues. In 2014, the American Psychological Association reported that only 2 percent of its members were Black (Mental Health America). The lack of Black mental health professionals further exacerbates issues of mistrust and miscommunication for Black men seeking help. I believe that factors like this one moderates access to mental health. Systemic oppression and institutional racism exist in the forefront of the collective experience of Black men.

In Chapter two, I analyze the autobiographical work of Zitkala-Ša as she recounts her childhood and education in a white boarding school during the 19th century. Zitkala-Ša left her home to attend an American Indian school, where she faced overt institutional racism and fought against assimilation. During this time, she experiences a form of political depression due to obstructed agency. Zitkala-Ša exposes the violent methods of assimilation and reconciles with the trauma that bled into her relationship with her family and culture. Underneath the feelings of obstructed agency is anger, which, in her adult life, Zitkala-Ša uses for the advancement of Indigenous people in the United States. Anger is her response to racism, and it becomes a source of energy to fight injustice.

I chose to present these two distinct works as my master's portfolio, because each chapter addresses questions of race that I have struggled with all my life. Academia is a historically white dominated space, and, as I move forward in my education, I am realizing that this history has affected me more than I previously thought. I have spent the last year reflecting on my educational experiences, and as I sort through feelings of isolation, anxiety, and discomfort. It has become clear to me that there are feelings of unresolved anger. I have felt despair over being a racial minority in white dominated academia. I have felt like I was simultaneously ignored and put on display. At times, I felt as if there was no hope, that by choosing academia it meant choosing to feel despair. It is too easy to allow myself to dwell on the negative experiences and too easy to give into an all-consuming anger. Although, at times, giving into these feelings of despair provides a catharsis and also a fleeting reprieve. Therefore, I believe community and community building to be the answer to reconciling with despair. The greatest source of healing that I have found has been with being around those who can understand and relate to my lived experience. It is with my community of peers that I have learned to be vulnerable and forthright with my feelings. There is no fear of being misunderstood or judged; there is only empathy. With this revelation of community, I have chosen to bring together contemporary hip-hop artists and Zitkala-Ša. I believe that the intent of these artists and Zitkala-Ša within their work is to find and create a community. To accomplish this, vulnerability and the willingness to listen and understand is paramount from both the writer and the audience. In her autobiographical work, Zitkala-Ša explicitly

states that the process of assimilation took her away from her family and culture. The pain she experienced, both physical and emotional, was ignored. In her adult life, she focused on political activism on behalf of Indigenous people. She accomplished this by creating and being a member of various coalitions with the purpose of advancing Indigenous people. For the hip-hop artists, they all experienced some form of loss, anxiety, or trauma. These artists chose to share incredibly personal experiences via the mainstream media of music. The music they created was a means of exploring and understanding their own pain. In doing so, they created a community via their fans, a group of people willing to listen to their message. Despite their intent, these artists have faced criticism due to their chosen platform of hip-hop music, a platform that has been accused of glorifying drug and alcohol abuse and violence. The message of community and helping others who may also be in pain is often ignored because of these accusations. My purpose in analyzing hip-hop music and the work of Zitkala-Ša is to listen to their message according to the writer's intent and attempt to bring an awareness to the importance of their work.

Marvin's Room and Mental Health: The New Space of Hip-Hop

We listen to music to set the mood in our everyday lives, but there is much more that happens when we listen to music. Music is not only good for the soul but also the mind. The use of music as therapy can be traced back to World War II, when doctors started to include it in the treatment of what was called shellshock in the 20th century but is now called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Since then, music as a method of facilitating improved cognitive functions in classroom settings has dominated the field of music therapy. In the last decade, music has been studied as a method of treating affect disorders like anxiety and depression. The scientific findings from these studies are that music can affect the way the brain functions, creating a kind of iceberg effect where the true impact is recognized beyond the surface choice of playing one's favorite song. When we listen to music, the emotional processing centers of the brain are activated, and the emotions produced are comparable to our everyday emotions (Koelsch, et al. 307). With the ability to affect mood and emotions, can we as the public at large, ask for music that does more than entertain? I believe that many artists, specifically hip-hop artists, have already begun to answer that question. Artists such as Drake, XXXTentacion, Kid Cudi, and Kanye West have written songs that chronicle their own struggles with depression and suicidal thoughts. In doing so, they can contribute to a shift in our culture when it comes to how we discuss mental health. In this paper, I will be analyzing the lyrics of six songs, released in the last eleven years that reference issues of mental health. It is my belief that in discussing these issues in a public manner, both creators and listeners can create a new space where understanding and healing can occur, Marvin's Room.

Marvin's Room is a space where musical artists can share and work through the difficulties and challenges of everyday life, the vulnerable moments that are hidden as taboo. Hip-hop artists have never been shy when discussing cultural taboos such as sex, violence, drug and alcohol abuse. It has long been a platform where taboos were discussed openly by artists such as N.W.A. and Tupac, but in the last decade or so, a new trend has emerged. The topic of mental health has become a recurring theme in many popular songs, creating a space to change how mental health is discussed. This has allowed the discussion to come to the forefront of our social consciousness. The hip-hop artists mentioned here by no means did it first, but they have created an accessible and creative outlet to speak candidly on the topic. Drake is one of the artists that used hip-hop music to discuss mental health issues early on in his career. In 2011, he released the song "Marvins Room"; the name being inspired by the room where the song was recorded. According to the song's producer, known as 40, it was the same recording studio that R&B artist Marvin Gaye founded in Los Angeles (Powers). The song received critical acclaim, getting certified triple platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (Suarez). "Marvins Room", which will be examined in further detail, was praised for its overt emotional vulnerability in discussing the experience of heartbreak and loss. Producer 40 went on to further commend Drake for using music to break away from the stereotype of who a hip-hop artist is supposed to be.

The easiest thing to do is be like, "I'm the coolest guy, I get all the girls, I'm untouchable". The hardest thing to do is be vulnerable and honest.

[Marvins Room] opened the doors for artists in Drake's position to make music from their heart and not be so confined to self-imposed rules and regulations (Glicksman).

In creating "Marvins Room", Drake entered a metaphorical space where artists can be vulnerable and work through emotions that are not commonly associated with hip-hop music. This space is where artists can be themselves without the pressures of fame. They are no longer bound to the abstract idea of a hip-hop artist that indulges in vice but free to explore the hardest part of being human; how to be vulnerable. The vulnerability these artists share becomes a tool of empowerment for them. Marvin's Room is a space where they have permission to be human and show weakness. The commercial success of the song speaks directly to the shift in our society when it comes to mental health. Where it was hidden in taboo for men and more specifically, Black men, it is now in the forefront thanks in part to music.

The secrecy of mental health issues can be challenged in Marvin's Room but with the help of new and emerging scientific discoveries, artists can incorporate these findings to help those who struggle with it. I am not suggesting that these specific artists are aware of these emerging discoveries but instead envisioning a future in which this information influences the future of mainstream and popular music. I am imagining a future where music can be a part of a holistic, all-encompassing method of mental health treatment. Music can affect the brain on a neurological level and, in particular, the regions associated with emotional regulation. The use of music in relation to everyday life has been an

interest of study in the last twenty years. Music can strongly affect emotion and mood while also activating various structures of the brain involved in cognitive and emotional processing (Koelsch 307). The core structure of emotional processing is the limbic system which also processes and regulates emotions, memory storage, and is heavily involved in the body's response to stress (Guy-Evans). One study had subjects listen to naturalistic music while receiving PET scans and found that virtually all limbic and paralimbic structures were affected (Koelsch 307). Additionally, researchers noted that the experience evoked "chills" or "shivers down the spine" in participants. The increased chill sensation correlated with increased regional cerebral blood flow in regions of the brain associated with reward and emotion (Koelsch et al, 307). The researchers also found decreases in regional cerebral blood flow in the amygdala and the hippocampus (Koelsch et al, 308). The hippocampus is where episodic memories are formed, and the amygdala's main function is regulating emotional responses (Guy-Evans). The amygdala is also key in the formation of new memories and attaches emotional content to memories. These findings were significant for many reasons: one, it supported the hypothesis that music can evoke "real" emotions, because of the changes in brain activity occurring while listening to music. Two, it reinforces the theory that music can be used in therapeutic treatment of affective disorders such as depression and anxiety (Koelsch et al, 308). Another study found that music therapy could be applied in treating patients with depression and PTSD. The act of listening to music changed the level of activity in the hippocampal formation, and a loss of hippocampal neurons and

blockage of neurogenesis (Koelsch et al, 308). Depression in adults specifically has been associated with an increase of neurons in the hippocampus (Schoenfeld). This is significant because it strengthens the hypothesis that music therapy can help to reanimate activity in the hippocampus.

In discussing mental health, it is important to note the statistics when it comes to issues of mental health. There is a correlation among race, gender, and socio-economic status that seems to point to minorities, specifically men living below the poverty line, as those most likely to suffer from some form of mental health issue. According to data from a 2016 study by the US Department of Health and Human Service's Office of Minority Mental Health, African American male adults are 20 percent more likely to report serious psychological distress compared to white males (Smith, 593). Another study conducted in 2015 found that depression and PTSD affected almost 50 percent of African American men and women (Smith, 594). This study found that these individuals were being treated for traumas ranging from car accidents, death in the family, and physical and sexual assault. The Office of Minority Health reported in 2016, that African Americans living below the poverty line were three times more likely to report serious psychological distress compared to their same race peers living above the poverty line. The same report also found that African American teenagers were more likely to attempt suicide than their white counterparts, 8.3% vs 6.2% (Smith, 594). Conversely, the trends on a national level, it is reported that African American men are less likely to receive professional mental health care. The

former US Surgeon General, David Satcher, said this on the disproportionate rates of care and treatment of mental health issues.

Minorities in the U.S. suffer a disproportionate burden of mental illness because they have less access to services than other Americans; receive lower quality care, often from services that are fragmented, costly, and inadequate; and are less likely to seek help when are in distress, in part because the considerable stigma attached to mental illness in many cultures (Smith 595).

There are many intersecting reasons why men and, more specifically, African American men are not receiving the care they need. Dr. Satcher noted that there is a considerable stigma attached to mental illness throughout many cultures. This trend is also found in the music I have chosen to analyze. All the songs chosen are performed by African American men and all deal with themes of loss and death. Many of these songs bluntly mention the lack of help available and a fear of being perceived as weak if they admit to mental health issues. These artists were chosen for their distinct discussion of mental health both through their music and their personal life.

The first song I will analyze is “Marvins Room” by Drake. It was initially released online via his personal blog and then formally included on his 2011 album *Take Care*. The song follows a dialogue between an inebriated Drake and a woman with whom he is reminiscing about the relationship they used to have. The beginning of the song includes an audio clip of an actual phone conversation

between Drake and the woman and repeats specific lines of dialogue throughout the song.

Cups of the Rosé/... The woman that I would try/ Is happy with a good guy/ But I've been drinking so much/ That I'ma call her anyway and say/ Fuck that nigga that you love so bad/ I know you still think about the times we had... Are you drunk right now? (Drake 0:30-1:16).

Drake is dealing with his own remorse that the relationship ended but also acknowledging that she is happier in her new relationship. However, in his inebriated state, he continues to obsess over her and criticize her choice to leave the relationship by disparaging her new one. Later, he discusses the struggles he is having with fame and the new life that comes with it.

I think I'm addicted to naked pictures/... We threw a party, yeah, we threw a party/ Bitches came over, yeah, we threw a party/ I was just calling 'cause they were just leaving/ Talk to me please don't have much to believe in/ I need you right now, are you down to listen to me? (Drake 2:56-3:23).

The new life is not satisfying for him, and even though he has opportunities to start a new relationship, he keeps going back to the previous one. Drake is also working through feelings of desperation and a desire for a connection beyond what he currently has; meaningless encounters. This new life is making him hopeless for a future beyond what he is currently experiencing, so he is reaching out to the person who knew him before the fame in an effort to hold onto the person he once was. He is confessing that fame is uncomfortable for him, and it

has left him feeling alone. The woman continues to ask “Are you drunk right now” in between these confessions, suggesting that it is abnormal for him to talk this way. The song becomes a last-ditch effort to win back the woman’s affections. Towards the end, in a clip that seems to come from the actual phone call, he asks “You not gonna to come? / Guess I’m ‘bout to just kick it here then” (Drake 4:22-4:27). Despite his attempts, the woman is not convinced and leaves Drake no choice but to accept the reality of his new life. The song paints the image of a lonely and desperate man, not the typical hip-hop superstar. Drake made a conscious choice to publicize his rejection by inviting an audience to witness it. He is trying to contextualize the feelings of a break-up and, in doing so, he is able to finally move on. The subject matter of the song is one that is already relatable but the use of the audio clips from the phone conversation adds another layer of realism. It gives the audience the feeling of a real break-up that could be like the one they experienced in their own life.

The second song I will analyze is “Jocelyn Flores” by XXXTentacion, commonly referred to as X. It was released in 2017 on his debut studio album *17*. The song was written as a homage to a deceased friend of the same name who died by suicide. The two had a short romantic relationship, and it was during a vacation to X’s home state of Florida that Jocelyn was found deceased in a hotel bathroom (Hitt). The song starts with X working through his own emotions after finding out that she had died. He has become obsessed and, as time goes on, his thoughts continue to come back to her.

I don't wanna pretend we're somethin', we're nothin'/ I've been stuck
thinkin' bout her, I can't hold on/... Picture this, in bed, get a phone call/
Girl, that you fucked with killed herself/ That was this summer and nobody
helped/ And ever since then, man, I hate myself (XXXTentacion 0:35-
0:57).

X is struggling with the legitimacy of his feelings, how much he is allowed to be upset. He had a complicated relationship with Jocelyn, and he is unsure how to mourn her, as a friend or a girlfriend. Regardless of their relationship, it is affecting him, and, in that uncertainty, he is turning the anger inward towards himself. The situation is made worse by his own trauma of losing a family member to suicide.

Memories surface through the grapevine/ 'Bout my uncle playin' with a slip
knot/ Post-Traumatic stress got me fucked up/ ... I've been feelin' pain/
I've been feelin' pain just to hold on/ I don't feel the same/ I'm so numb
(XXXTentacion 1:06-1:22).

The event with Jocelyn has triggered the memories of his uncle's suicide, causing X to deal with the two traumas as if they are one. The combined events are weighing on him to the point that he is considering suicide. X is laying himself bare in exposing his own grief and trauma. He is speaking candidly about how all the trauma builds on each other and makes it difficult to find a way through it. The song deals with complex emotions, and how grief is not finite; there is no moment when it stops affecting you. X wanted this song to be his way to reach out to his audience and help them with their own grief. Additionally, I want to

examine another song, “The Explanation”, from the same album. I believe this song is important in understanding X’s altruistic motivations for making this specific album. “Jocelyn Flores” is technically the second song on the album, but in the opening track, X is directly addressing his audience. The song, “The Explanation”, is X explaining what the album is and what he hopes his audience will understand after listening.

By listening to this album, you are literally/ And I cannot stress this enough/ Literally/ Entering my mind/... Here is my pain and thoughts put into words/ I put my all into this/ In the hopes that it will help cure/ Or at least numb your depression (XXXTentacion 0:17-0:44).

The music on the album was an outlet for X to express and contextualize his own emotions. Concurrently, he wanted to help others. He hoped that someone listening would be able to heal from their own mental health struggles.

The fourth song I will analyze is “Swim in the Light” by Kid Cudi. This song was released in 2016 from his sixth studio album *Passion, Pain & Demon Slayin’*. Kid Cudi has spoken frequently about his on-going battle with depression and anxiety. In 2016, he announced via Facebook that he would be entering a rehab facility due to depression and suicidal urges.

Yesterday I checked myself into rehab for depression and suicidal urges. I am not at peace... If I didn’t come here, I wouldve [sic] done something to myself...My anxiety and depression have ruled my life for as long as I can remember and I never leave the house because of it... Im [sic] tired of being held back in my life. I deserve to have peace” (Moorwood).

It was shortly after he finished treatment that he released this album. The song starts with the chorus in which Kid Cudi seems to be repeating a mantra, reassuring himself that he made the right decision in seeking professional assistance with his mental health. “You could try and numb the pain, but it’ll never go away/ You could try and numb the pain, but it’ll never go away/ Yeah/ Damage control/ The same old tricks won’t work no more” (Cudi 0:16-0:46). Kid Cudi admits that the methods he used in the past to deal with his emotions were just a band-aid solution, only providing temporary relief. Eventually, he must address his emotions and take stock of what is happening and how serious the situation is. He tried to endure and continue to live his life like nothing was wrong, but he knew better. “What is to do? I’ve been low enough/ Who knew I’d make it out? / I jumped too low, now out the way” (Cudi 0:56-1:09). The situation he was in was precarious. He waited almost too long for help. Kid Cudi doubted if he could get out of this situation, but now that he made that first step to recovery, asking for help, he is emphasizing that the situation was dire. However, he is also praising himself for being able to get help rather than continue suffering. He understands that seeking help is the best way to get better and encourages his audience to do the same. “Calls from the dark/ I got hope in my eyes/ No help inside/ I’mma swim in the light/ She’s trya pull me in/ But the same old tricks can’t work no more/... Swim in the light/ Swim in your love/ Let’s get well” (Cudi 1:47-4:11). Kid Cudi wants to get better, but he also understands that it will take time, and he will always struggle with his mental health. He knows that trying to get better on his own will not work. The methods he used in the past are not long-

term solutions. The best course of action is to be honest and ask for help, that is the only way he will get better. The song is a call to normalize asking for help and understanding that attempts to mask the feelings of despair will never make the situation better.

The fifth song I will analyze is “I Thought About Killing You” by Kanye West. The song was released in 2018 from his eighth studio album *Ye*. The album cover features a picture of a snowy Wyoming mountain landscape taken by Kanye himself (Harris). The picture also features a caption that reads “I hate being Bi-Polar its awesome” (Harris). West has been vocal on social media about his bi-polar diagnosis, and it has been the subject of debate: whether his behavior online can be excused or explained by his diagnosis. In discussing his mental health struggles, he admitted to having “moments where I felt, like, suicidal...” (Weiss). The song flows like a conversation, it feels like a moment where he is having an honest discussion with someone, and it closely depicts his current mental health. “Today I seriously thought about killing you/ I contemplated, premediated murder/ And I think about killing myself/ And I love myself way more than I love you, so... You’d only care enough to kill somebody you love” (West 0:24-0:50). The struggles with his mental health are not only targeted at himself. This time, he is thinking of hurting someone he cares about. This line of thought he is having is not just a fleeting moment, he is taking the thought further and planning how he would hurt this person. West understands that this idea would be taken seriously if he spoke about it publicly, but he cannot help what he is thinking. “I think this is the part where I’m supposed to say

some thin' good/ To compensate it so it doesn't come off, bad/ But sometimes I think really bad things/ Really, really/ Really bad things" (West 1:35-1:50). West is speaking critically about how we address uncomfortable and taboo topics. He is implying that in the past when he discusses his "really bad things" that he is meant to follow it with something good. It is social practices like this that prevent honest conversation about mental health issues from happening. In doing so, those who struggle with communicating their struggles are not able to get the help they need. West also struggles with the fear of being understood. His attempts to speak about the "bad things" are explained incorrectly. "See, if I was trying to relate it to more people/ I'd probably say I'm struggling with loving myself/ Because that seems like a common theme/ But that's not the case here" (West 2:01-2:10). The implication is that his struggles were misunderstood as something else, his feelings were interpreted as something that could be applied to many people. The song gives the audience a chance to reflect on how much they know about the topic of mental health. West is using his own experiences to bring attention to the fact that part of the problem with discussing mental health is that we do not know how to talk about it. West portrays one side of this conversation, the fight for legitimacy. A person who discusses their mental health has to find the space to do so, but they also have to fight to be understood. The way we discuss mental health makes a difference in how we treat those who struggle with it. Kanye West does not place blame on anyone or anything specific, but he encourages a conversation where both sides listen.

The final song I will analyze is “u” by Kendrick Lamar. The song is from his third album, released in 2015, *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Lamar has received critical acclaim for his work since his debut album in 2011 and has been praised for his genre-bending music and socially conscious songwriting. The cultural impact of his work has earned him the California State Senate’s Generational Icon Award in 2015 and, later, a Pulitzer Prize for music in 2018; the first hip-hop artist to be awarded (Braboy). “u” starts with Lamar screaming as he immediately goes into an emotional declaration of how he feels about himself.

Loving you is complicated x10/ I place blame when you steal/ Place shame when you steal/Feel like you ain’t shit/ Feel like you don’t feel, confidence in yourself/ Breakin’ on marble floors Watchin’ anonymous strangers tellin’ me that I’m yours/ But you ain’t shit I’m convinced your talent’s nothin’ special (Lamar 0:00-0:49).

Lamar admits that the relationship he has with himself is complicated. There is a moment when he tries to explain his feelings as a lack of confidence, but he takes it further and questions his own musical abilities. He disparages himself and does not believe that his talent as a musician is worthy of praise. He believes that when others praise him, he is stealing it from a more worthy artist. The song makes a clear distinction that there are two versions of himself: the hip-hop star and the insecure, emotionally troubled man. Lamar continues to make this distinction as this alter ego starts to speak directly to him.

Situation had stopped with your little sister bakin’/ A baby inside, just a teenager... Whats your intentions where is the influence you speak of/ You

preached in front of 100,000 but never reached her/ I fuckin' tell you, you fuckin' failure you ain't no leader (Lamar 1:00-1:11).

It becomes increasingly clear that Lamar struggles with his self-worth and battles moments of self-loathing. Lamar uses his music to reach thousands of people but when it comes down to a single person, like his sister, he is unable to help.

Lamar is blaming himself for the situation with his sister, he is implying that in his own actions, or lack of action in this case, directly led to the situation. He poses the question to himself: what good is your influence, if it can't help those closest to you? He continues to explore these feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing this time in the perspective of his emotionally unstable alter ego.

I never liked you, forever despise you I don't need you/ The world don't need you, don't let them deceive you/ Numbers lie too, fuck your pride too, that's for dedication/ Thought money would change you, made you more complacent/ I fuckin' hate you, I hope you embrace it (Lamar 1:17-1:23).

Lamar's alter ego is trying to isolate him and normalize the hate he feels for himself. It implies that he has struggled with these feelings for a long period of time and, even though his life has changed and has risen to stardom, it means nothing. The alter ego is telling him that he means nothing, and the world is deceiving him into believing he has achieved anything of significance. It is telling Lamar that, no matter what, he will never be rid of the doubts that plague him, telling him to embrace it. The alter ego continues its assault on Lamar's feelings and tries to weaponize them against him.

Are you the reason why mama and them leavin'/ No you ain't shit, you say
you love them, I know you don't mean it/ I know you're irresponsible,
selfish, in denial, can't help it/ Your trials and tribulations a burden,
everyone felt it (Lamar 2:28-2:39).

The alter ego will not allow Lamar to seek help in dealing with his struggles. It accuses Lamar of never loving his family, because his actions directly led to his mother leaving. It poses Lamar as a reckless figure that has shown himself to be self-interested; he never considered how his actions might affect others. The alter ego twists his vulnerability into a reckless act that only considers Lamar's future. It further isolates Lamar from everyone around him and conditions him to believe that any attempts to share these feelings will cause a similar outcome. The only way to prove his love for his family is to suffer alone and in silence. The alter ego also paradoxically blames Lamar for exercising the choice to leave rather than stay. It convinces Lamar that staying and burdening others with his problems is selfish. However, he will get no relief from leaving, as it causes suffering in other ways.

Where was your presence, where was your support that you pretend?... A
friend never leave Compton for profit or leave his best friend/ Little brother,
you promised you'd watch him before they shot him/ Where was your
antennas, on the road, bottles and bitches/ You faced time the one time,
that's unforgiven/ You should thought he would recover, well/ The surgery
couldn't stop the bleeding for real/ Then he died, God himself will say "you
fuckin' failed (Lamar 2:45-3:16).

The alter ego is using the death of Lamar's friend as another example of how he causes suffering to those around him. He promised he would never leave Compton to seek wealth, but he does, and it caused the death of his friend. Lamar feels guilty over being able to leave and create a new life for himself. The alter ego convinces Lamar that his "selfish" pursuits of fame meant leaving everyone else behind and that this absence caused suffering. The alter ego further critiques Lamar for not caring enough to come back. Before, it told Lamar that the world didn't care about him and that he couldn't help anyone, then it blames him for being unable to save his friend. The alter ego continues its attack on Lamar's mental state, this time adding a threat to his physical well-being.

I know you secrets nigga/ Mood swings is frequent nigga/ I know depression is restin' on your heart... Bitch everything is your fault... I know your secrets/ Don't let me tell them to the world about that shit you thinkin'... Shoulda killed yo ass a long time ago/ You shoulda filled that black revolver blast a long time ago/ And if those mirrors could talk it would say "you gotta go"/ And if I told your secrets/ The world'll know money can't stop suicidal weakness (Lamar 3:33-4:25).

The alter ego references Lamar's mental health struggles with depression and suicidal thoughts. It states that these struggles are a secret, something that Lamar feels ashamed of having and keeps to himself. It is manipulating Lamar into believing that something bad will happen if he lets anyone know about his depression. It continues to tell Lamar he is to blame for all the difficulties he has experienced, and that suicide is the only way to rid himself of these feelings. In

sections of this verse, there are also sounds of bottles and glasses clinking together, implying that Lamar frequently uses alcohol as a coping mechanism for his depression. Drinking gives the alter ego more power over Lamar's mental state, boldly persuading him to hurt himself. The song goes into all the pressure Lamar puts on himself; he wants so badly to create music with meaning that it creates new anxieties. This leaves Lamar to feel that what he is doing is inadequate and it begins this cycle of remembering all the ways he failed to help himself and others. The song gives the audience full access to Lamar's mental state as he struggles through feelings of depression, survivors' guilt, and suicidal urges. The fear of being exposed and having the truth of his condition laid bare is found all throughout the song. The song itself is a disruption of power, taking it away from the alter ego. Lamar is instead choosing to ignore the threats and intimidation tactics of his alter ego. He uses music to finally be truthful with himself and the audience, despite his fears of exposure.

The use of music in therapy has produced notable discoveries and provided new information on how the brain functions. I believe these discoveries can empower hip-hop artists to take the vulnerability of Marvin's Room to new heights. Artists can be mindful of how music affects the brain and then incorporate it into their music. Many artists have expressed a desire to make music that means something. They want to be able to help their audience through music, often without an interest in themselves. XXXTentacion expressed this desire on social media and explicitly in his music. In "The Explanation", he forsakes the idea that money is his motivation in creating music. "And if you are

not willing to accept my emotion/ And hear my words fully/ Do not listen/ I do not value your money/ I value your acceptance and loyalty” (XXXTentacion 0:24-0:35). He makes it clear that his music is meant to reach the audience on a deeper level. He wants a relationship with the audience, which means they need to be just as vulnerable as X. The audience needs to be willing to hear the message, not just the words. This requires the audience to one, accept the existence of Marvin’s Room, and two, listen to the message beyond what they hear. The audience needs to empathize with the plight of the artist to truly understand the message in order to feel the emotions the artist is contextualizing. Drake has also expressed a similar desire in the initial online release of “Marvin’s Room”. He had posted it to his personal blog and his record label’s parent company, Universal, ordered the songs to be removed. Drake posted his frustration on social media saying, “Universal needs to stop taking my f-king songs down. I am doing this for the people not for your label” (Glickman). The decision to make this song accessible on the internet speaks to the importance of connecting with the audience. These artists are using Marvin’s Room to disrupt the idea of the typical hip-hop star. The old model of a hip-hop star was someone who lived in excess: drugs, alcohol and women. It was a person who exuded a bravado that is not sustainable or realistic. This person does not exist. They purposely try to hide the realities of their life behind a larger-than-life persona. It is also a persona that needs to constantly be defended. There can be no weakness shown. If weakness is shown, the artists risk losing the favor of the audience and the respect of their fellow artists. Marvin’s Room requires all these

personas to be left at the door. In terms of release date, “Marvins Room” was released before the other songs analyzed. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Drake’s work has inspired other artists to follow suit in making music that shows vulnerability. It is a space where artists can be vulnerable and honest with themselves. They can address their weaknesses head on without the fear of rejection or more seriously their ability to continue with their craft. This vulnerability works both ways, not just placed entirely on the artists. The audience needs to be willing to listen and respect their work. Music will always be a source of entertainment, but it can do so much more. Marvin’s Room can continue to inspire artists to share their struggles and be the space where all are welcome to heal together.

To conclude, the discussion of mental health in hip-hop music is not innovative or unique to recent years. However, it has never coincided with a cultural shift in how we as a society address and understand mental health as recent years have demonstrated. Despite a societal shift there are several factors that prevent men and in particular Black men from seeking professional help. There is a correlation between race, gender, and socio-economic status as well as cultural stigma that reveal the disproportionate rate of Black men seeking professional help compared to their white male counterparts. The therapeutic and transformative power of hip-hop music can help bridge the gap by, at the very least, leading by example. If these hip-hop artists can be vulnerable in a public manner, then it becomes a part of the public social consciousness and discourse.

This is an important and necessary first step in healing trauma on an individual and community level.

The Politically Productive “Ugly Feelings” of Zitkala-Ša

Zitkala-Ša, born as Gertrude Simmons, chronicled her experience at White’s Manual Technical Institute in Wabash, Indiana where she attended on and off from 1884-1895 in a series of short autobiographical stories. These stories were originally published in 1921 in a collection titled *American Indian Stories, Legends, and other Writings*. The collection also includes stories of her childhood on the Yankton Sioux reservation in South Dakota as well as her time as a teacher at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. In *American Indian Stories* Zitkala-Ša reflects on the violence and trauma she experienced at the boarding school while also resisting the pressures of assimilation. Within her stories there are several instances where she can identify and classify her emotions clearly; anger is clearly present in some of her memories at the boarding school. However, this anger converges with many other complex emotions that Zitkala-Ša does not fully understand her anger during that period of her life. The focus of this essay will be to examine select stories within *American Indian Stories* and analyze them within the theoretical framework of Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*. Additionally, I will use a select speech by Audre Lorde to expound upon how Zitkala-Ša uses her anger to propel her activism for Indigenous rights. The purpose of using Ngai and Lorde is to understand how “ugly feelings” can be transformed into a focused and precise response to racism.

In Sianne Ngai's book, *Ugly Feelings*, she explains how engaging with feelings associated with "obstructed agency" can recuperate the negative affects "for their critical productivity" (Ngai, 3). She writes:

As a whole, the book approaches emotions as unusually knotted or condensed "interpretations of predicaments"—that is, signs that not only render visible different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner. My exclusive focus, however, is on the negative affects that read the predicaments posed by a general state of obstructed agency with respect to other human actors or to the social as such—a dilemma I take as charged with political meaning regardless of whether the obstruction is actual or fantasized, or whether the agency obstructed is individual or collective (Ngai, 3).

For Ngai, negative feelings can be used productively to identify experiences that are caused by a lack or block of political agency. The negative feelings of anger and fear found in *American Indian Stories* are addressing Zitkala-Ša's final emotional state, but they are also speaking to the larger issues of racism towards Indigenous people in the nineteenth and twentieth century. However, it is important to bear in mind that the autobiographical stories are written by Zitkala-Ša as an adult, meaning she is reflecting on these experiences years after they have happened. It is in this reflection that she is reconciling with the "ugly feelings" of her past and understanding that these feelings have culminated into anger- anger over the treatment of not just herself at the hands of the boarding

school but of her family and other Indigenous people. Conversely, there are clear moments in her childhood where she identifies her anger, but these occurrences come in bursts and quickly transform into a different emotion. Later in the essay, I will address anger not as obstructed agency but as Audreya Lorde has stated: “a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (Lorde, 127).

In the section titled “The School Days of an Indian Girl,” she recounts the beginning of her journey to the Indian boarding school. “The Land of Red Apples” is the story of Zitkala-Ša's trip on the “iron horse” with her soon-to-be classmates that starts out hopeful and filled with excitement but ends in fear.

We had been very impatient to start on our journey to the Red Apple Country... We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse, but the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us... I sank deep into the corner of my seat, for I resented being watched. Directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats, with their bold white faces towards me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. Their mothers, instead of reproving such rude curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children's further notice to my blanket. This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears. (Zitkala-Ša et al, 87).

Zitkala-Ša can identify exactly what this experience made her feel: disturbed, troubled, resentment, and embarrassment at the hands of white people. She is disturbed that the presence of her Indigenous culture by way of

her moccasins and blanket in this white dominated space is attracting attention. It is interesting to note that, at this point, she does not speak, nor does she understand English. However, she is still able to make sense of what is happening by examining the looks and gestures of the mothers and their children. Zitkala-Ša calls the children bold and rude for staring at her, but worse are the mothers that encourage rather than reprimand the behavior. This is a stark contrast to the lessons she was taught by her own mother about intruding upon others and boldness. In the story “The Beadwork,” Zitkala-Ša recalls that boldness was classified as a negative trait, and her mother would reprimand her if she ever exhibited that trait. “... how humiliated I was when some boldness of mine drew forth a rebuke from her!” (Zitkala-Ša et al, 74). In noting how the mothers reacted and did not admonish their children when they saw her appearance, she is also making an explicit critique of how white mothers are raising their children. In “My Mother”, she recalls the lesson from her mother during childhood: “She taught me no fear save that of intruding myself upon others” (Zitkala- Ša et al, 68). In essence, she was taught to respect the boundaries of others, a respect that has not been historically honored between white and Indigenous people. However, the lack of understanding both in ability to communicate and of her own Indigenous upbringing, leads to further emotional distress for young Zitkala-Ša. Upon arriving at the boarding school, she experiences more intrusion into her space.

My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon. Entering the house, I stood close against the wall. The strong glaring light in the

large whitewashed room dazzled my eyes. The noisy hurrying of hard shoes upon a bare wooden floor increased the whirring in my ears. My only safety seemed to be in keeping next to the wall. As I was wondering in which direction to escape from all this confusion, two warm hands grasped me firmly, and in the same moment caught me in her arms. I was both frightened and insulted by such trifling. I stared into her eyes, wishing her to let me stand on my own feet, but she jumped me up and down with increasing enthusiasm. My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter. Remembering this I began to cry aloud. (Zitkala- Ša et al, 88).

She distinguishes fear and panic in the moments leading up to the encounter with the woman. She was already disturbed by the people on the train, and then upon arriving at the school, she experienced a range of panic inducing stimuli. The glaring lights and hard shoes on wooden floors cause her to panic and cling to the wall for safety. As she contemplates how she will escape her new and unfamiliar setting, an unknown woman literally invades her space to further induce panic. Zitkala- Ša is unable to communicate with words how frightened she is so she tries to communicate through looks just as the mothers and children did on the train. This tactic does not work, as it only encourages the behavior of the woman, but it also, once again, incites another critique. She remembers how her mother viewed and treated her in comparison to this woman who treated her as a plaything. She states in "The Beadwork" that her mother "treated me as a dignified little individual." On the reservation, Zitkala- Ša was

treated with dignity, but, in the boarding school, she feels like an object, dehumanized and no longer a person.

She continues the story by recounting the loneliness she felt on her first night at school.

As I did not hush my crying, one of the older ones whispered to me, “Wait until you are alone in the night” ... “Oh I want my mother and my brother Dawée! I want to go to my aunt!” I pleaded; but the ears of the palefaces could not hear me. From the table we were taken along an upward incline of wooden boxes... I was tucked into bed with one of the tall girls, because she talked to me in my mother tongue and seemed to soothe me. I had arrived in the wonderful land of rosy skies, but I was not happy, as I thought I should be. My long travel and bewildering sights had exhausted me. I fell asleep, heaving deep, tired sobs. My tears were left to dry themselves in streaks, because neither my aunt nor my mother was near to wipe them away (Zitkala- Ša et al, 89).

The combination of all her experiences thus far had overwhelmed her, and now she wants the comfort of her family. Zitkala- Ša is given the advice to wait until the end of the day when she is alone in her bed before she can let herself feel all her emotions. The advice comes from another student that presumably was told the very same advice themselves or learned firsthand to hide their emotions. She notes that her pleas were unheard by the “palefaces”, but there could be a couple different interpretations of this silence. The teachers at the school may not have understood the Sioux language that Zitkala- Ša spoke and therefore have

been unable to understand when she spoke of wanting her family. Alternatively, it could be that these same teachers simply did not care that she was crying. If one of the older students is giving her the advice to hold in her emotions, it seems reasonable to infer that Zitkala-Ša is not the first student to arrive and experience a similar affect. Furthermore, she states that the only person who was able to “soothe” her at this moment was another student that spoke the same language. The limitations of communication have been noted explicitly by her in these three stories. The inability to communicate her feelings due to the language barrier has caused her embarrassment, insult, and unhappiness: obstructed agency. It is the direct result of white people and their actions that leave her unable to speak or act in accordance with her feelings. It is only when Zitkala-Ša can communicate with the student who speaks her “mother tongue” that she has expresses feeling anything remotely positive since she left her home.

The next story in *American Indian Stories*, Zitkala-Ša faces “the hardest trial in that first day” at the boarding school; the cutting of her hair. In the story titled “The Cutting of My Long Hair,” she describes the trauma of having her hair forcibly cut against her will. She notes at the story's beginning that the events of the previous days have left her feeling defeated. “The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless” (Zitkala-Ša et al, 89). Again, she mentions the language barrier, but this time she articulates that, for her,

whenever she hears English being spoken, it brings up feelings of impending dread and pandemonium. She is bound and powerless when it comes to communicating her feelings and, though she has a desire to fight back, it is useless. The feeling of defeat against the trespasses of white people on her very being are taken further by the act of cutting her hair.

Late in the morning, my friend Judéwin gave me a terrible warning. Judéwin knew few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards! We discussed our fate some moments, and Judéwin said, "We have to submit, because they are strong," I rebelled. "No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!" ... On my hands and knees I crawled under a bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner... I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair. I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own

mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder (Zitkala-Ša et al, 91).

This event was traumatizing for Zitkala-Ša, so she wanted to rebel against the act of cutting her hair and tried to hide from her white trespassers. The white people at the boarding schools do not understand the cultural significance of her long hair and, even though they are “bigger,” she chooses to fight like the warrior her mother spoke of in her childhood. She hides under a bed to escape her fate; she understands that she cannot communicate with words the implication of cutting her hair, and her only attempt to stop this affront from happening is to hide. After she is found, the white people respond to her rebellion with violence. Zitkala-Ša is dragged out from under the bed. She fights against them, resisting so much that they tie her to a chair. The image she describes is a frightened child, screaming because white people have, once again, intruded into her space and, despite her obvious attempts to break free, they ignore her protests. Even with the language barrier, anyone could see that this is a frightened child screaming for help. She recalls feeling the cold blades of the scissors on her neck and still she continued to fight and shake her head, as they cut her hair. What Zitkala-Ša is describing is a last resort in a desperate attempt to get away; she was willing to potentially harm herself if it meant a possibility of escaping. It is when they finally succeed in cutting off one her long braids that she describes as the moment when she lost her spirit. She explains that only unskilled warriors captured by the enemy have their hair “shingled.” Zitkala-Ša, “unskilled” only because she was outnumbered in this white dominated space and was a small,

young girl of eight, was captured by her enemies. She hides from them and, when found, fought so hard that she was tied to a chair and, even then, continued to fight until the moment her hair was cut. She also explains that among her people, short hair is worn by mourners. This is exactly what she has become, a mourner of her lost freedom and of her spirit. Additionally, she states that “shingled” hair is the mark of a coward. In Zitkala-Ša’s fight till the end, she demonstrated that she is the exact opposite of a coward. Nevertheless, she loses her fight. To her people, she would be seen as a coward, and the knowledge of this leaves her feeling defeated. This, defeat, however, was only one event of many that she calls “extreme indignities.” She suffered through being stared at and being tossed about like a wooden puppet. The treatment she had received made her feel dehumanized; she calls herself a puppet and then an animal driven by a herder. She has had no agency since leaving her home, and, even in her pain, as she cries for her mother, she is ignored. In her anguish, there is no one to offer her any comfort. In her final line of the story, however, she conveys some hope. She states: “...for now, I was one of many little animals.” She acknowledges that, at this moment, she felt defeated but, in the future, that changes.

In the boarding schools, Zitkala-Ša learned to disregard her own feelings and adopt the customs of white people. However, she does continue to fight against the repressive and cruel treatment of her trespassers. There are moments where she expresses anger and, in those moments, she actively defies the attempts of assimilation. These bursts of anger, while later in her life, will

become the power she uses to fight back against the injustices done to her community. As a young girl they come quickly and transform into a new emotion. “The Iron Routine” is the story of such a moment, but it comes in response to the death of a classmate.

A loud-clamoring bell awakened us... From happy dreams of Western rolling lands and unlassoed freedom we tumble out upon chilly bare floors back again into a paleface day... We rushed downstairs... to land in the assembly room. A paleface woman, with a yellow-covered roll book open on her arm and a gnawed pencil in her hand, appeared at the door... No matter if a dull headache or the painful cough of slow consumption had delayed the absentee, there was only enough time to mark tardiness. It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day's buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pain, I have many times trudged in the day's harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute. (Zitkala-Ša et al, 96).

Zitkala-Ša remarks that when she dreams of home, she is happy. She associates home with freedom and the boarding school with its “iron routine”, which is like a harness that weighs her down. The routine is a method of civilization, a method that is mechanical and almost impossible to stop once it has begun. The sounds of the morning bells are like the buzzing of a machine that begins in the morning from the moment she wakes up. This civilizing machine is a process run by white people. To her these people are cruel and blind to her pain, like a machine

incapable of emotions or empathy. Zitkala-Ša states that this machine does not care about her or her classmates and even illness, whether serious like consumption or minor like a headache. It does not recognize pain. The only thing the machine, white people, take note of is the absence of the individual, not the reason or cause for the absence. This is why she has since learned to suffer in silence, because the machine cannot be reasoned with; the white people have chosen to ignore the pain they hear and see. As the story continues, Zitkala-Ša witnesses the death of her classmate at the hands of the civilizing machine.

Once I lost a dear classmate. I remember well how she used to mope along at my side, until one morning she could not raise her head from her pillow. At her deathbed I stood weeping, as the paleface woman sat near her moistening the dry lips ... I grew bitter, and censured the woman for cruel neglect of our physical ills... Though I was sullen in all my little troubles, as soon as I felt better I was ready again to smile upon the cruel woman. Within a week I was again actively testing the chains which tightly bound my individuality like a mummy for burial. The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above those of smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear (Zitkala-Ša et al, 96-97).

The classmate before her death would “mope along” much like Zitkala-Ša describes previously, weighted down by the heavy harness of the assimilation. This classmate continued this way until, one day, her illness overcame her, and she was unable to leave her bed. Zitkala-Ša remembers standing by her bed as she died, a memory that is filled with many emotions, one of which is anger. She is angry that the neglect, which she calls cruel, has led to her friend’s death. After her friend’s death, she grew bitter and disapproved of the white people’s neglect towards the suffering of the students. The bitterness and resentment turns to anger, and she marks this by the explicit criticism of the white people’s lack of empathy and their willful ignorance towards the suffering Indigenous children. However, Zitkala-Ša details that, eventually, she was able to let go of her anger and in time was “ready again smile” at the woman she specifically holds accountable for her friend’s death. In response to the death of her friend, Zitkala-Ša actively attempted to fight against the oppressive bonds of assimilation. These bonds restricted her individuality, and she understands that the goal is to kill that part of her being. The story’s ending does not address the feelings of her younger self as they happened, but it reflects her memories and feelings of her school days as an adult. She is stating that she felt a profound melancholy during those days that, as an adult, she continues to feel like a shadow that has continued to follow her. She admits that the boarding school was able to wear her down. The “smoothly grinding school days” stripped her of her individuality. As an adult, she has reclaimed her Indian nature. Despite this reclamation in her adulthood, she still finds it difficult to be *just* angry when she reflects on those

memories of her school days. These sad memories stand out above the anger and, even though she feels conflicted about how exactly she should feel, the truth of the cruelty of the boarding will only be heard by those who choose to be sympathetic. She can talk about the horrors of her treatment and bring awareness, but, in the end, there is that fear that she will again be ignored. The next section titled “An Indian Teacher Among Indians” features an older Zitkala-Ša as a teacher. In 1897, at the age of 21, she began teaching at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania (Zitkala-Ša et al, xvii). “My First Day” begins with her explanation of why she has chosen to teach in the school system that traumatized her rather than return home.

Though an illness left me unable to continue my college course, my pride kept me from returning to my mother. Had she known of my worn condition, she would have said the white man’s papers were not worth the freedom and health I had lost by them. Such a rebuke from my mother would have been unbearable, and as I felt then it would be far too true to be comfortable (Zitkala-Ša et al, 104).

At the boarding school, she suffered emotional and physical trauma. Zitkala-Ša experienced the loss of her culture and of a friend due to neglect, but her pride keeps her from returning home. When white missionaries first came to her home and spoke with her mother about sending her to the boarding school, her mother was resistant to the idea. Zitkala-Ša’s mother warned her of the suffering she would endure if she were to leave home. In “The Big Red Apples”, her mother says:

With a sad, slow smile, she answered: There! I knew you were wishing to go... Don't believe a word they say! Their words are sweet, but, my child, their deeds are bitter. You will cry for me, but they will not even soothe you. Stay with me, my little one! (Zitkala-Ša et al, 84).

The warning from her mother was true and it is exactly what happened to Zitkala-Ša at the boarding school. If she were to return home, it would be like admitting to her mother that she was right but that is not the entire reason she stays away. In the opening story "My Mother", Zitkala-Ša states that her mother's pride was seeing her free spirit. "These were my mother's pride, —my wild freedom and overflowing spirits" (Zitkala-Ša et al, 68). Zitkala-Ša has lost her freedom, and it is because she chose to go to boarding school. The recognition that she is no longer free with an overflowing spirit which was her mother's pride, is the uncomfortable truth. She has lost her freedom but continued her education and now, she is working for the white people that are responsible for her current condition.

In the next story, "A Trip Westward", Zitkala-Ša is returning home after the superintendent of the Carlisle School wants her to recruit more students. Once she is back on the reservation, she visits her mother and is upset to see the conditions of her home.

Her two windows, directly opposite each other, she curtained with a pink flowered print. The naked logs were unstained, and rudely carved with an axe so as to fit into one another. The sod roof was trying to boast of tiny sunflowers, the seeds of which had probably been planted by the constant

wind. As I leaned my head against the logs, I discovered a peculiar odor that I could not forget. The rains had soaked the earth and roof so that the smell of damp clay was but the natural breath of such dwelling. "Mother, why is not your house cemented? Do you have no interest in a more comfortable shelter? ... "You forget my child, I am now old, and I do not work with beads any more. Your brother Dawée, too, has lost his work position, and we are left without means to buy even a morsel of food," she replied. Dawée was a government clerk in our reservation when I had last heard from him... "Dawée! Oh, he has not told you that the Great Father in Washington sent a white son to take your brother's pen from him? Since then Dawée has not been able to make use of the education the Eastern school has given him." (Zitkala-Ša et al, 108-109).

The home that Zitkala-Ša's mother lives in is poorly built and unfinished. There is no assistance from the United States government, and her mother has no means to provide for herself now that she is unable to continue with beadwork. After going to a boarding school and becoming educated by white people, Dawée was able to provide for their mother by working as a government clerk. However, that job was taken away from him and given to a white person. Dawée has no job and is unable to utilize his education on the reservation. Later in the story, her mother mentions that the reason why Dawée lost his job was due to an attempt to help their tribe. "The Indian cannot complain to the Great Father in Washington without suffering outrage for it here. Dawée tried to secure justice for our tribe in a small matter, and today you see the folly of it" (Zitkala-Ša et al, 109). The

attempt in the past to help their tribe resulted in the Government retaliating against them. Dawée lost his job, and now their mother is living in an uncomfortable home with no food. Zitkala-Ša is unable to help as she will return to the Carlise School and her family will continue to suffer. She, however, has already become jaded and does not believe that her family will find any justice. Zitkala-Ša tells her mother: “Let us not look for good or justice: then we shall not be disappointed!” (Zitkala-Ša et al, 109). She has experienced injustice during her schooling and has seen firsthand how little white people care about a sick or dying Indigenous person. She has given up on trying to find the good in the ways of white people and, in doing so, she is no longer disappointed when they fail to acknowledge her suffering.

The final story in “An Indian Teacher Among Indians” is Zitkala-Ša understanding that underneath the feelings of obstructed agency was anger. The feelings of embarrassment on the train, confusion upon arriving at the boarding school, fear as she is thrown into the air by a white woman, anguish when her hair is cut against her will, and resentment at the neglect that led to her friend’s death; this is what obstructed agency feels like for Zitkala-Ša. In her adulthood, she realizes that all those feelings have become a hidden anger within herself, and this anger is what leads her to leave her teaching position. In “Retrospection”, Zitkala-Ša explains her anger against the white people for what they have done to her and others.

Leaving my mother, I returned to the school in the East. As months passed over me, I slowly comprehended that the large army of white

teachers in Indian schools had a larger missionary creed than I had suspected... I find it hard to count that white man a teacher who tortured an ambitious Indian youth by frequently reminding the brave changeling that he was nothing but a "government pauper." Though I burned with indignation upon discovering on every side instance no less shameful than those I have mentioned, there was no present help... At this stage of my own evolution, I was ready to curse men of small capacity for being the dwarfs their God had made them. In the process of my education I had lost all consciousness of the nature world around me. Thus, when a hidden rage took me to the small white-walled prison which I then called my room, I unknowingly turned away from my one salvation. Alone in my room, I sat like the petrified Indian woman of whom my mother used to tell me. I wished my heart's burdens would turn me to unfeeling stone. But alive, in my tomb, I was destitute!" (Zitkala-Ša et al, 111-112).

She has come to understand that the process of educating Indigenous children was not an altruistic endeavor. The white "teachers" at the boarding schools were not helping but instead torturing them. These same teachers would repeatedly tell the Indigenous students that they "needed" the white man's help. Zitkala-Ša is overcome with a hidden rage over the injustice of her people but also because there is nothing to stop white people from continuing with their "civilizing machine." She is regretful that the "civilizing machine" has taken her away from her one salvation: nature. The school and, more specifically, her room, is a tomb that leaves her disconnected and without the necessities of life. She is

imprisoned in this tomb with the knowledge that there is no one willing to help her and with her anger over the fact that she willingly gave up her connection to her culture. Zitkala-Ša continues to reflect on her anger and decides to put it to “critical productivity.”

For the white man’s papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit. For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. On account of my mother’s simple view of life, and my lack of any, I gave her up, also. I made no friends among the race of people I loathed. Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends. The natural coat of bark which had protected my oversensitive nature was scraped off to the very quick. Now a cold bare pole I seemed to be, planted in a strange earth. Still, I seemed to hope a day would come when my mute aching head, reared upward to the sky... At last, one weary day in the schoolroom, a new idea presented itself to me. It was a new way of solving the problem of my inner self. I liked it. Thus I resigned my position as a teacher... Now, as I look back upon the recent past, I see it from a distance, as a whole (Zitkala-Ša et al, 112).

Zitkala-Ša gave up so much of herself for the “white man’s paper.” She gave up her own faith in favor of the white man’s religion. She gave up her mother and her culture and forgot about the healing power of nature. Zitkala-Ša recounts the violent manner in which she gave up her culture, by force. white people stripped her of her Indigenous ways and left her a bare pole, uprooted from everything

she knew of before going to school. She states that her natural coat of bark was scraped off, leaving her oversensitive nature vulnerable. Despite having been stripped of her natural state and being disillusioned by the true intent of the white teachers, she does have hope to regain what she has lost. The feelings of obstructed agency that have become anger are what Zitkala-Ša referred to as the problem of her inner self. She finally understood her anger when she took a step back and viewed it in its entirety, not as a single moment of panic or embarrassment but as an ongoing process of assimilation.

Anger is not an “ugly feeling.” Ngai briefly discusses anger as a powerful and dynamic cathartic emotion, whereas “ugly feelings” are non-cathartic. This distinction echoes the description of anger as a response to racism that Audrey Lorde gave during her keynote presentation at the National Women’s Studies Association Conference in 1981. She was an American writer, professor, radical feminist, and a civil rights activist. Lorde’s activism and creative writing confronted injustices of racism, sexism, and homophobia. The speech titled “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism,” is Lorde’s personal response to racism, anger. She states:

Women respond to racism. My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life... Women responding to racism means women responding to anger; the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use,

stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation (Lorde, 124).

Lorde lived with her anger and fought against it and finally gave in and used it to serve a bigger purpose. She notes that anger is a response to silence and betrayal; two things that Zitkala-Ša explicitly mentions in her autobiographical stories. When her friend suffered through her illness in silence, she felt angry towards the neglectful behavior of the white teachers. In her first days at the boarding school, she cried for her home and mother, but the teachers never tried to understand or soothe her tears. Zitkala-Ša returns to the reservation and sees her mother's home in a state of disrepair and her brother unable to make use of his education to provide the means to care for their mother. The US Government retaliated against her people when Dawée tried to obtain justice on their people's behalf; they were betrayed by the "Great Father in Washington." Zitkala-Ša lived with her anger all throughout her school days, but it was not till adulthood that she understood it. Once she was able to move past the feeling of hopelessness associated with obstructed agency and see the anger that percolated underneath, Zitkala-Ša was able to shift her anger into advocating for Indigenous rights. Lorde continues in the same speech to say, "Anger is loaded with information and energy" (Lorde, 127). Zitkala-Ša focuses her anger into political activism and towards the advancement of Indigenous people. The education she gained at the boarding school was used to share her experience but also to explain to white people that their methods of assimilation were cruel. The teachers at her school did not or could not understand the trauma they were

inflicting by cutting her hair or intruding into her space. Zitkala-Ša was taken from her home and forcibly “civilized” and, although she was angry about what was done to her, she was not trying to destroy the “civilizing machine” but survive it. During her school days and as a teacher, she went by the name given to her at birth, Gertrude Simmons, but she later renames herself Zitkala-Ša, which translates to Red Bird. She wanted to reclaim her Indigeneity and ensure that her culture would survive. At the end of “The Uses of Anger,” Lorde proclaims:

I speak here as a woman of Color who is not bent upon destruction, but upon survival... We use whatever strengths we have fought for, including anger, to help define and fashion a world where all our sisters can grow, where our children can love, and where the power of touching and meeting another woman’s difference and wonder will eventually transcend the need for destruction (Lorde, 133).

Zitkala-Ša worked to fashion a world where Indigenous people could live as their true selves without the threat of forced assimilation. After she makes the decision to leave the Carlisle School, she focuses the rest of her life on the preservation of Indigenous culture and advancement of Indigenous people.

Zitkala-Ša resigned her position at the Carlisle School in 1899 and attended the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston (Zitkala-Ša et al, xvii). While at the Conservatory she also had her fictional and autobiographical works published in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. In 1916, she was elected secretary and treasurer of the Society of American Indians (SAI), which was the first national Indigenous political organization run entirely by

Indigenous people (Zitkala-Ša et al, xxiv-xxv). The SAI fought against the abuses of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) when it came to issues of land allotment, education, assimilation, and citizenship. The SAI worked on the local and national level by initiating a community center movement that was aimed at building community centers on reservations to provide social services to impoverished Indigenous people. Even after the SAI dissolved in 1911 due to internal disagreements, Zitkala-Ša continued to advocate for the rights of Indigenous people (Zitkala-Ša et al, xxvi-xxvii). In 1926, she founded and was elected president of the National Council of American Indians (NCAI), which advocated for redressing tribal inequalities that famously had the motto “Help Indians Help Themselves in Protecting Their Rights and Properties” (Zitkala-Ša et al, xxviii). Zitkala-Ša routinely addressed Congress on issues of Ute land and monetary claims, land allotment settlements for Navajos, and distribution of rations and supplies to the Yankton Sioux tribe. A major victory for Indigenous people came when US president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, passed the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934 as part of the New Deal policy, which ended the allotment policies of the Dawes Act and recognized tribal governments as sovereign nations (Zitkala-Ša et al, xliii).

Conversely, it is important to note that, while many scholars, including Indigenous scholars, focus on the positive achievements of Zitkala-Ša, she was a complicated individual that often acted against preservation. Robert Warrior, a professor of American literature and culture and member of the Osage Nation, has been critical of Zitkala-Ša’s conservative stance on peyote. In his book,

Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions, he discusses the anti-peyote legislation passed in the US during the 20th century. Zitkala-Ša was an advocate for temperance and a strong critic of peyote use. She wrote many letters expressing concern for public safety and the danger to both “social and family welfare” (Zitkala-Ša et al, xxii). Warrior is also critical of the SAI and the generation of activists that were involved with the organization. One such member was Carlos Montezuma, who at one point was engaged to Zitkala-Ša, and who was a radical progressive, believing that Natives were superior to white people but not given the chance to prove it because of obstacles like Indigenous languages and reservations (Warrior, 8). While Warrior is critical of the SAI, he also does not condemn Zitkala-Ša and her contemporaries for their support of the US government’s anti-Indigenous policies. He states:

Simply to label them misguided, brainwashed, self-hating collaborators, in other words, misses the point of their achievement. This is not to suggest that we allow their sincerity to blind us to the perturbing implications of their work, which provides a means of asking difficult ethical, cultural, and political questions in the context of complex, often dire, situations (Warrior, 8).

Warrior, at times in his book, views Zitkala-Ša as a product and supporter of assimilation but does not deny the importance of her work or the benefit of discussing her complicated affiliations.

Zitkala-Ša was able to fight for the rights of Indigenous people, and she did so by utilizing both her Indigenous upbringing and her education in the white

boarding school. She was able to bring attention to the systematic disenfranchisement of Indigenous people in a time that was filled with the most horrific Indigenous and white confrontations. While there is no explicit mention of specific events, the massacre at Wounded Knee took place nine years before Zitkala-Ša left the Carlisle School. The blatant racist attitude of white Americans towards Indigenous people could not have been easy for her to ignore while living among them. However, she refused to let her anger destroy her and instead became one of the most prolific Indigenous writers and activists of the twentieth century.

By examining Zitkala-Ša's stories within the framework of "Ugly Feelings" and drawing inspiration from Lorde's perspective on anger, a new understanding on how emotions associated with obstructed agency serve as tools for recognizing and responding to experiences of racism and oppression. Zitkala-Ša's journey of reconciling with her past and harnessing her anger as a driving force for Indigenous rights underscores the transformative potential of emotions in shaping political movements.

Bibliography

Braboy, Mark. "Kendrick Lamar Is the Artist of the Decade." *Insider*, Insider, 9

Dec. 2019, <https://www.insider.com/kendrick-lamar-artist-of-the-decade-2010s-2019-12>.

CDC-About Mental Health- Homepage.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>. June 6, 2023

Cudi, Kid – "Swim in the Light." *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Kid-cudi-swim-in-the-light-lyrics>.

Drake – "Marvins Room." *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Drake-marvins-room-lyrics>.

Glicksman, Josh. "Songs That Defined the Decade: Drake's 'Marvins Room'."

Billboard, 22 Nov. 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/drake-marvins-room-songs-that-defined-the-decade-8544118/#respond>.

Guy-Evans, Olivia. "Limbic System: Definition, Parts, Functions, and Location."

Limbic System: Definition, Parts, Functions, and Location - Simply Psychology, 22 Apr. 2021, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/limbic-system.html>.

Harris, Hunter. "Kanye Took the Photo on His New Album Cover Himself."

Vulture, Vulture, 1 June 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/2018/06/kanye-took-the-photo-on-his-new-ye-album-cover-himself.html>.

Hitt, Tarpley. "The inside Story of Jocelyn Flores, the Tragic Teen Who Inspired XXXTentacion's Hit." *The Daily Beast*, The Daily Beast Company, 8 Mar. 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-inside-story-of-jocelyn-flores-the-tragic-teen-who-inspired-xxxtentacions-hit>.

Koelsch, Stefan, et al. "Music in the Treatment of Affective Disorders: An Exploratory Investigation of a New Method for Music-Therapeutic Research." *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2010, pp. 307–316. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2010.27.4.307>. Accessed 23 Nov. 2022.

Lamar, Kendrick. "U." *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-u-lyrics>.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press, 1984.

Mental Health America. "Black and African American Communities and Mental Health." www.mhanational.org/issues/black-and-african-american-communities-and-mental-health . Accessed 10 June 2023.

Moorwood, Victoria. "Fan Thanks Kid Cudi for Bringing Awareness to Mental Health." *REVOLT*, 3 Mar. 2020, <https://www.revolt.tv/article/2020-03-03/80184/fan-thanks-kid-cudi-for-bringing-awareness-to-mental-health/>.

Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard University Press, 2005. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cwm/detail.action?docID=3300232>.

Powers, Ann. "In Modern Rap, Echoes of Marvin Gaye's Deep, Damaged Soul." *NPR*, NPR, 17 June 2011,

<https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2011/06/17/137245761/in-modern-rap-echoes-of-marvin-gayes-deep-damaged-soul>.

Schoenfeld, Timothy J, and Heather A Cameron. “Adult Neurogenesis and Mental Illness.” *Neuropsychopharmacology : Official Publication of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Jan. 2015,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4262910/>.

Smith, Edward J. “Discussing Suicide without Being Crucified: The New Renaissance of Mental Health in Hip-Hop.” *The Handbook of Research on Black Males: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Multidisciplinary*, edited by Theodore S.

Ransaw et al., Michigan State University Press, 2019, pp. 591–610. *JSTOR*,

<https://doi.org/10.14321/j.ctv4g1qgh.49>.

Accessed 11 Dec. 2022.

Suarez, Gary. “Drake Is Now the RIAA's Top Certified Singles Artist Ever.”

Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 29 June 2018,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/garysuarez/2018/06/29/drake-riaa/?sh=6c6596356c15>.

West, Kanye – “I Thought about Killing You.” *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Kanye-west-i-thought-about-killing-you-lyrics>.

Warrior, Robert Allen. *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*. Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1995.

XXXTENTACION – “The Explanation.” *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Xxxtentacion-the-explanation-lyrics>.

XXXTENTACION – “Jocelyn Flores.” *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Xxxtentacion-jocelyn-flores-lyrics>.

Zitkala-Ša, et al. *Zitkala-Ša: American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, 2003.