Growing up in hip-hop: the expression of self in hyper-masculine cultures

Introduction

In a recent podcast, rappers Talib Kweli and Evidence discuss the conflict between constructed rap-identity and individual-identity as a person ages. Both men in their 40s, Kweli describes how a rapper's persona 'becomes like an armour' and Evidence observes that 'after a while that stops getting rewarding' (People's Party with Talib Kweli 2019: 6:54). This highlights the need, as hip-hop grows older, for artists to be able to express their own growth, development and change. As per Kweli's description, armour is a form of protection but it also means that you literally can't see the person underneath, speaking to the limiting nature of a fixed, closed-off rap persona, where you are unable to share concerns, vulnerability or traits considered outside the narrow bounds of mainstream (hyper)masculinity. Kweli's comment, combined with Evidence's observation that performing this armoured character can ultimately stop being 'rewarding', demonstrates both this limiting and squeezing of masculine expression and, importantly, the idea of a musician's writing being something that the artist themselves grow from and through, as well as being for the consumption of an audience.

This article is about growing up, changing and expressing emotion within existing culture and genre structures, all of which can be difficult from the position of a fixed artist persona (Krims, 2000). Considering the 'rewarding' element, this is an autoethnographic study into an artist ranging from growing up *with* hip-hop as a youth, to growing up *in* hip-hop, through documenting the process, unpacking life experiences and working though feelings and emotions. For the purpose of this article, the distinction between growing up *with* and *in* hip-hop could be considered a spectrum of passive to active engagement. By 'growing up in hip-hop' I refer to the active process as a fan engaging with artists' releases intellectually, emotionally and socially but also as an artist: writing, producing and performing.

A brief note about myself as an artist: over the last fifteen years—both as the solo artist, Solareye, and as part of the live hip hop group, Stanley Odd—I have released five studio albums, and four EPs, toured the UK extensively, played in Europe, the

USA and Africa, been shortlisted for Scottish Album of the Year and won *Best Hip-Hop* at the Scottish Alternative Music Awards 2018. When I talk about growing up in hip-hop I am referring to the spaces and possibilities for personal growth, self-expression and understanding of self that come about through the acts of writing, performing and engaging in hip-hop culture.

Methodology

Taking an autoethnographic approach, this article will look at examples in my own work with hip-hop group, Stanley Odd, that focus on personal, reflexive commentary as opposed to cultural or social commentary. These songs reflect me as an individual human being (as opposed to me, the constructed rap persona) expressing universal themes such as love and fatherhood. Studying my own work presents a series of opportunities and perspectives. Firstly, the autoethnographic response is one means for an artist researcher to re-engage with their own work, to present their art as research and then, in this case, to present some of those findings in a more traditional academic context. Secondly, examining these works through a hip-hop lens presents some examples of creative and personal negotiation within social, cultural and genre-based boundaries. Finally, links and comparisons can be made between global hip-hop culture as derived from its US iterations, localised hip-hop culture and local Scottish culture in relation to masculine and hypermasculine indicators. This article is about artistic strategies to engage with emotive and personal issues, exploring alternative performances of masculinity in the process.

In this article, I will initially discuss existing concepts around hip-hop culture, the performance of masculinity, and the expression of self. This involves connecting-the-dots between self-expression and perceptions of masculinity in a range of domains: US/ Global and local hip-hop, wider global/ local cultures, and individual expression. Following that, are the three case studies that comprise the central part of the paper. Each case study is chosen for its emotive and personal content, while evidencing attempts to navigate and negotiate around the edges of hip-hop form. Case Study One is concerned with love. This topic is problematic for all number of reasons including the sheer difficulty of finding an original way to approach the most common subject in the history of song. Further to this, love is often equated with weakness in the hypermasculine geography of hip-hop, and when it does appear is often forced

into highly stereotyped images and ideas. Case Study Two concerns parenthood. Again, the aim here is to play with structure, content and delivery to stay within set parameters but to depict personality and character through the presentation of anti-heroic masculine performance. Finally, Case Study Three voices personal crisis, and struggle with alcohol and substance abuse. Intrinsically tied to Scottish drinking culture and social norms, this speaks to masculinity both in the personal conflict described, and in the approach to creating the piece. Through these pieces I aim to present a range of approaches taken to express emotive content, develop personal growth and work through life experiences through the production of hip-hop songs.

Multi-method approach

This paper utilises autoethnography for its central methodology, supported by other methods to create an academically rigorous, multi-method approach. As a critical lens, autoethnography has been criticised in the past for its potential to be 'self-indulgent' and 'narcissistic' (Coffey 1999: 133), lacking in critical objectivity. Being that these very words are often levied as criticism at rappers and hip-hop artists, I am not unaware of the irony of a rapper deciding that autoethnography is the best means to address a topic. However, more in-line with the analytical autoethnography described by Anderson (2006), a multi-method approach can be very useful in providing key insights and analysis from an artist-researcher perspective, while also maintaining academic rigor. By this means, any autoethnographic findings are supported by a scaffold built from other relevant methods. In the case of this paper, poetic analysis, musicology, cultural studies and sociological perspectives will be employed to validate and analyse the outcome of autoethnographic work.

This approach makes sense for a number of reasons. Firstly, hip-hop studies itself is a multi-disciplinary field and so combining perspectives in a multi-method approach allows reflection on an artist's work through a range of lenses already established in the subject area. Secondly, in the case of self-analysis of an artist's work, the autoethnographic process is travelling in the opposite direction to the more sociologically-inclined creative-writing format of autoethnography championed by Botchner and Ellis (2001). Rather than being designed to find creative ways of sharing and examining work in a traditionally academic field, it is about allowing the artist to take part in analysis and research of their existing creative output. As such,

autoethnography can be a very powerful means of gaining unique insight into the artist's work, while surrounding it with a more traditional academic framework helps to validate and support the findings.

Aging, expressing emotion and masculinity

In 2006, Mark Anthony Neal asked the question, 'What does hip-hop look like when it becomes grown folks' business?' (Morgan & Neal 2006: 235), asserting that as hip-hop ages as a culture, 'hip-hop right now is about growing up'. Having been born of defiance and youth culture, many of hip-hop's core values (both positive and negative) make the act of aging, or admitting to it, quite troublesome. Forman (2014: 302) notes that 'Age in hip-hop has, thus, been almost singularly associated with youth even as this construct becomes less tenable'. As with many aspects of hip-hop culture, a preoccupation with remaining youthful and denying adult responsibilities is perhaps a valid reflection of wider contemporary culture. Problems for artists as they age can be found in abundance. An example from GZA's 2008 performance in Glasgow is highlighted in this review where the author states: 'GZA underlines this lack of mobility by pulling up a stool to perform Animal Planet' (Drever 2008: n.pag.). This is interesting in that, for my generation, the image of an old blues musician such as Muddy Waters performing on a stool is completely acceptable but that accommodation of age has not been reached or considered viable yet in hip-hop. If a person is not allowed to age, they are not allowed to change. If they are not allowed to change, then they are frozen in a perpetual, fixed state, unable to grow or 'become', only able to 'be', forever as they are. Hence, aging is directly linked to personal development, to expressing different feelings and emotions.

Difficulties in expressing feelings abound in a genre where even the phrase to 'catch feelings' is considered a derogatory comment. Take DMX's (1999) 'What These Bitches Want':

> I fucks with these hoes from a distance
> The instant they start to catch feelings
> I start to stealin' they shit
> Then I'm out just like a thief in the night

This DMX verse highlights considerably more than just the problem of expressing certain emotions in hip-hop. It speaks to hip-hop's issues with sexism, patriarchy,

misogyny, hyper-masculinity and perceptions of manhood. Neal (2013: 63) refers to a sub-culture, ‘largely premised on highly contrived essentialist notions of black masculinity’. In this case, the acceptable means to perform masculinity in hip-hop culture, and subsequently in how Black America sees itself reflected, become reduced and simplified into the two dimensional ‘thug’ character. In the context of American culture, Dyson (2012: 367) describes these prejudices in hip-hop as ‘the ugly exaggeration of viewpoints that are taken for granted in many conservative circles across the nation’. While not deflecting from the issues of sexism and hyper-masculinity that exist in hip-hop, this does introduce the idea of sub-cultures and musical genres reflecting the issues that exist in wider mainstream society. These issues can be reflected as social observation or critique but they can also be reflected in their absorption, acceptance, amplification and repetition.

By no means limited to the USA, comparisons can be drawn to UK grime artist Stormzy in 2015’s ‘Shut Up’:

> I set trends, dem man copy
> They catch feelings, I catch bodies

In Stormzy’s lyrics he sets up contrasting positions in each line, attaching the positive attribute to himself and the negative attribute to his opponents. He explains that he sets trends while others are copying and that while others catch feelings i.e. fall in love or have emotional attachment, he catches bodies i.e. kills people (either metaphorically or literally). While much of Stormzy’s lyrical content is very progressive, acknowledging mental health issues, reflecting on society and culture, these lyrics demonstrate the continued emphasis on hyper-masculinity in rap and negative connotations of exhibiting emotional attachment.

From her ethnographic work in London’s hip-hop scene, Speers refers to a scene that is ‘so male dominated’ (2017: 7). Regina N. Bradley dissects gender in hip-hop, breaking it down as, ‘Hip-hop masculinity is aggressive, dominant and flattened while hip-hop femininity is submissive, (hyper)sexual, and silenced’ (2015: 182). Rose (2008: 4) observes and criticises the narrow boundaries of hyper-masculinity in hip-hop, linking them to a process of commodification, commercialisation and simplification, noting, ‘The trinity of commercial hip-hop – the black gangsta, pimp,

and ho – has been promoted and accepted to the point where it now dominates the genre's storytelling worldview'. Such tropes result in one-dimensional narratives, where expressing masculine identities without this super-powered, violent, outlaw image is considered weak, diluted and/or inauthentic. Again, not simply limited to hip-hop, this oversimplification of individual histories and personal characteristics is evident across society where, in order to make sense of the world, people with perceived social or cultural similarities are grouped together and ascribed the same character traits (Appiah 2007). Binary definitions of people's behaviour, feelings or characteristics will always result in an incomplete picture, reducing the means by which individuals can express themselves.

To return to Dyson's comments regarding hip-hop reflecting wider society, these issues are equally relevant in Scotland. In wider Scottish culture, images of masculinity are consistently tied to drinking culture (O'Brien, Hunt, & Hart 2009) and violence (Deuchar & Holligan 2014), and Scottish men have the lowest life-expectancy in Western Europe (National Records Scotland 2012). In fact, it would seem that Scottish ideals of masculinity have been relatively fixed and reductionist for a significant period of time.

Abrams and Ewan, in their analysis of masculinity across Scottish history open with an assault case in the Scottish Highlands in 1844, where the accused assaulted the plaintiff having had his ability to hold his drink, carry out physical labour and fight, called into question. From this it would be reasonable to ascertain that alcohol, physicality and violence were considered central indicators of manliness in 1844. These narrow and truncated views of masculinity can find many commonalities in contemporary Scottish culture, in a similar way that Dyson observes that 'hip-hop's hypermasculine pose reflects a broader American trait' (2012: 360).

Homberg-Schramm's work on postcolonialism and contemporary Scottish fiction is also useful here, observing:

> In Scottish fiction, women find themselves in a doubly marginalised position as women and as Scots. Men in turn are confronted with the stereotype of the Scottish 'hard man' and are limited by this stereotypical characterisation. (2017: xii)

This opens up an interesting and complex reading of Scots' psyche, one that considers the duality of both coloniser, simultaneously colonised. She continues:

> …from an English perspective, the stereotypical Scottish male has typically been constructed as defeated, uncivilised and, thus, effeminate, whereas an alternative stereotypical depiction of the Scottish man constructs him (at least for the entertainment of tourists) as a strong, virile man in full Highland dress with a kilt and bagpipes.

These postcolonial readings of Scottish masculinity go some way to introducing the reasons behind the construction of the fixed, hypermasculine, working-class, 'hard man' character that pervades Scottish culture. From these perspectives, it is not difficult to find links and commonalities between Scots' 'hard man' masculinity, the 'violent masculinity… at the heart of American identity' (Dyson, 2012: 359), and hypermasculinity in hip-hop. If so, then what we learn from this in hip-hop can be extrapolated out to wider society.

Rap strategies for expressing emotion

Davis (1985: 3) states: 'Lyrics that resonate with universally felt emotions foster strong identification between the performer and the audience'. The key for rap artists is to find a way to be original on universal topics *and* to write about emotional themes without compromising the persona they have created. Expressing real feeling means exposing yourself; making yourself vulnerable; highlighting your flaws. This is a problem in a culture designed to create invincible, seemingly flawless characters that are impervious to damage or pain. As Krims demonstrated in his study of Ice Cube, it can be difficult in an established identity to express new character traits with 'the collapsing of the persona and artist' (2000: 95). This highlights the performativity of artist identity but as Appiah (2007) notes, there are performative elements to every interaction in life and therefore these performances become about the lens through which each performance is viewed.

Artists such as Jay-Z, Eminem and Kanye West all demonstrate different techniques to maintain their public persona while expressing sentimental material. For Jay-Z, in 'Make the Song Cry' (2001), he transmogrifies the song, bestowing emotional abilities onto the piece of music itself and allowing it to cry in his place. His more

recent *4:44* demonstrates Jay's ability to continually redefine and grow his self-image, taking a more personal perspective on owning emotions and showing flaws. Neal discusses Jay-Z's 'social fluidity' (2013: 57), recognising his skill for shifting, changing and hybridising his persona(s) within the restrictive 'flattened' images available to black men in US culture and commerce. In 'New Day' (2011) Kanye takes the approach of wishing everything for his son that he is not, acknowledging his flaws without actually intimating that he can or will change. Eminem in 'Hailie's Song' (2002) breaks so many rules of masculinity in hip-hop by daring to sing the vast percentage of the song (also enjoying a position of privilege due to skin colour and market position). The topic of fatherhood allows this – where family is one of the few areas it is acceptable to show emotion – but even so he pushes it to its limit, just balancing the sentimental, melodic content with struggle, voicing a dual personality through his vocal performance in the pre-choruses and counteracting the saccharine of the sung verses with a more aggressive and more lyrical rap section at the end.

Childish Gambino's 2011, 'Untouchable', directly addresses contrasting and challenging images of masculinity, pushing at established boundaries. At once typically boastful and braggadocious, while also challenging stereotypes and conventional norms, he raps:

> And it only takes a lie to make a dynasty crumble
> That's why I catch feelings and these other dudes fumble

This is a very telling couplet, in that it accepts that he does have feelings in relationships contrary to hypermasculine directives, but equates this with honesty and being true to yourself, which in turn makes him more powerful rather than less. He still uses war (dynasty) and sports imagery (fumble). As such, the metaphors reside within established zones of masculinity but their purposes are subverted by championing truth and emotive expression. Continuing, he elaborates:

> Not another actor-turn-rapper in movies 'bout the hood
> Niggas say they want the real, but get mad when they hear the truth
> Please forgive them, father, for they're not knowing what they do
> I make this music so these younger dudes don't have to choose
> Trying to hate me means you really hate you

Insightful and lyrically playful, the culmination of this verse aims to dismiss the idea of one, fixed, homogenised image of authenticity, that is actually an endlessly repeating performance. Childish Gambino calls out the fact that any other expression of 'realness' or authentic expression is considered false and acknowledges the negative self-perpetuating effect this can have on individuals if it results in denying elements of your own self.

Stanley Odd, a case study

Williams (2016: 99) is quoted classifying my group, Stanley Odd, as falling within a group he describes as 'Celtic fringe marginalities.' My lyrical content has been described as 'cerebral' and 'socio-political' (Meighan, 2012), 'defiant, yet vulnerable' (Is This Music?, 2014), and as the 'voice of a generation' (Morrison, 2012). According to its reception then, my lyrics would likely fall into the 'reality rap' genre classification system devised by Krims (2000: 70). As a live band, with a female singer, whose musical elements often come from a rock music-base, there are all manner of reasons why Stanley Odd's output is already at odds with the 'hypermasculine dictates of contemporary rap music' (Neal, 2013). Marshall (2006: 868) draws attention to 'sampling's status as essential to the production of *real*, or *authentic* hip-hop', observing that live hip-hop group The Roots had to work to gain a credibility that was easier for many conventional hip-hop outfits to attain. The question of authenticity ties back to Childish Gambino's observations about truth and links to Speers' (2017) work on hip-hop authenticity versus rapper authenticity.

These conversations are also about attempts to play with and subvert dominant cultural narratives. This calls to mind Stokes' observations that:

> Subcultures borrow from the dominant culture, inflecting and inverting its signs… constituting a quite different, subversive whole (1994: 19)

Following Gates (1998) work on signifyin', this subversion is directly applicable to hip-hop culture and black cultural production. It follows then that a student of hip-hop would learn these techniques, allowing them to 'invert' and repurpose their own cultural phenomena (in this case for me Scottish culture) but that this process can then *also* be applied to global hip-hop culture itself as a dominant established culture to be mutated and repackaged for local authenticity. I bypass some of the

established restrictions for a number of reasons but still have to negotiate a complex maze of acceptable levels of self-expression even on the periphery of the more extreme masculine elements of the culture. As a white European male, privilege allows me to lower my guard to a certain extent, as does my situation outside of 'hardcore' hip-hop. Most of my creative output situates me in a less restrictive place as the rap persona I present is less a 'super-hardman' and more a 'super-geek'. However, I still take care not to lose touch with the genre boundaries that inform my work. Age also plays a part in this. As a 40-year-old, married father-of-two I am much more comfortable in my identity than I was as a youth and a young man. I am less often challenged and don't regularly feel the need to overemphasise my masculinity at this stage in life, which is to be expected as I age.

From this initial discussion, it becomes clear that age, change, personal growth and self-expression are at odds with established artist personas and perceptions of masculinity in mainstream patriarchal society. This article is about engaging with hip-hop to tell your own story. It is about contradictions, universal feelings and small personal revelations. From here follows an analysis of three songs released between 2012 and 2014 in which I make an effort to describe particular events in relation to growing, maturing and developing. These songs demonstrate a desire for personal growth and understanding, coupled with my development as a writer in finding ways to express the emotional content. Each example employs specific artistic strategies to achieve these goals.

Topic One: Love, 'Day 3' (2012)

'Day 3' is essentially a love story. Written as a duet with a sung vocal part and a complimentary rap vocal part, this song is an example of my attempt to manipulate form and content to present a universal and very common theme in an original way. In order to properly analyse the construction of this piece, a combined literary and musicological approach will be applied.

The music for 'Day 3' was written by Thilo Pfander, keyboard player in Stanley Odd. When he wrote the piece, he wrote it in 6/8 time, which although less common in hip-hop is by no means unheard of. Kanye West's 'Spaceship' (2004) is an excellent

example of hip-hop in 6/8, with the rap verses also written in 6/8 to fit the music. In the case of ‘Day 3,’ the time signatures and rhythms within the track became interesting because Samson – drummer with Stanley Odd – played in 4/4 over the top of the 6/8 instrumentation. This created an interesting effect where the musical and rhythmic sections repeat at different intervals with the 6/8 pattern repeating over 3 bars of 4/4. I decided to write lyrics in common time that could fit into the 3 bars of 4/4 it takes for the 6/8 pattern to repeat, capitalising on the rhythmical interplay between these two parts.

	Beats	**Rhyming Tercets**
6/8 beats	**1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2**	
4/4 beats	**1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and**	**1**
6/8 beats	**3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4**	
4/4 beats	**1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and**	**2**
6/8 beats	**5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6**	
4/4 beats	**1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and**	**3**

Figure 1: 6/8, 4/4 and Rhyme Scheme Relationships in Stanley Odd, ‘Day, 3’

The initial issue with typical lyrical structure was that standard rhyming couplets won’t fit into a 4/4 pattern that repeats in groups of 3 bars: there is an extra bar left over before the chord changes. The solution that I came up with, in order to rap with four beats in the bar, was to have rhyming couplets over two bars followed by an ‘answer’ bar from Veronika Electronika’s sung vocal completing each pattern (compiling a tercet). This allowed me to include two voices in the song and have them literally intertwined, completing each other; the full story incomplete without both parts. In this way, the structural components of the piece mimic the lyrical content.

The first 1min43s of the song consist of pared-back instrumentation and only Veronika’s sung vocal. These lines – that can work as a standalone poem – are actually the final line of each tercet when added to the rap section that enters with the drums at 1min44s.

> Perfectly balanced right
> Between night-time and breaking day

When the clocks are ticking in time
I can lip read
Click goes the missing piece
I'm feeling high now
Daylight dances on his wrist
Pulse a distant beat
He seems lost at moments
Singing those blues of his
A heart is a fickle device
This is where I want to be

Opening sung vocal from 'Day 3', Stanley Odd

Firstly, in this introductory section I am able to write in a less direct and more metaphorical manner than I normally would with rap lyrics. The sung sections have shorter lines as the lyrics stretch out across the bar more when sung than when rapped. I am able to take advantage of an audience being more familiar with song lyrics being left open to interpretation and using metaphorical imagery. Having said this, the piece is still both coherent and visually evocative. It sets the scene, the events taking place in between night and dawn (i.e. late night). It introduces the other character in the story, revealing snatches of information, implications of closeness 'pulse a distant beat', of potential conflict 'singing those blues of his' and of love 'a heart is a fickle device/ this is where I want to be'.

When the rap vocal arrives with the 4/4 drums at 1min44s the story is completed:

Her salt lips taste maritime, a volatile valentine
Words written at 451 Fahrenheit
Perfectly balanced right
In a dystopian present day the silence resonates
She turns as cities burn looking for a better way
Between night-time and breaking day
Sunrise touching me, a trick of the light
Her eyes shine playfully, picking a fight
When the clocks are ticking in time
Displeased, I ask won't you miss me
She says 'move closer I can lip read'
I can lip read
Raven-haired, she steals ma breath as she kisses me
Draws my soul through the gaps in my missing teeth
Click goes the missing piece
She smiles, raises an eyebrow and I could die now
Whispers in my ear and the screaming dies down
I'm feeling high now
She smiles like a nymph and laughs like a witch

I've been trying to find a way to capture her since
Daylight dances on his wrist
Talks of mystery, and of history
I stare in disbelief and admit defeat
Pulse a distant beat
I tell her 'you fix me and I'm often broken'
She maintains the mystique in constant motion
He seems lost at moments
Trickle feeds a mixture of truth and myth
With words that when spoken they bruise her lips
Singing those blues of his
I think her heart is bigger than mine
As we sink together with our fingers entwined
A heart is a fickle device
And stay twisted together, born atomically
I pray forever she'll be haunting me
This is where I want to be

Duet from 'Day 3', Stanley Odd

Here, elements of the story converge. In Veronika's sung verse it states that the events are taking place 'between night-time and breaking day' but then mention that 'daylight dances on his wrist'. This would seem contradictory but the line 'sunrise touching me, a trick of the light' updates the scenery between these two parts. Although still heavily metaphorical and utilising elements of epic imagery, my rap lyrics are much more of a direct narrative, describing events taking place. The sung lyrics slotted into each tercet are more observational, like the unspoken thoughts of the female character in the story. In terms of the lyrics, I would say that they are actually written in 12/4 against a 4/4 drum rhythm with the keyboards, bass and guitar playing in 6/8. In the instrumental outro there are two bass parts: one in 4/4 and one in 6/8 further linking the two sections.

The ultimate aim and – hopefully – outcome of the song structure is that neither individual vocal part is complete without the other. Only by combining the two together is the story made whole. I even felt that written down the two parts resembled a double helix of DNA, visually representing the line 'stay twisted together', which has the dual meaning of being intertwined and 'twisted' also referencing the continual themes of oddity and 'outsiderdom' that tend to permeate my work.

As regards a closer reading of the rap lyrics, in terms of form I have utilised a style that I would refer to as ‘epic’ to escape the trappings of standard pop love songs. The song is basically about falling in love with someone after a late, hedonistic night. As such, had Mike Skinner from The Streets written the piece then you would expect very literal, clear depictions of perhaps a flat or tenement, drug paraphernalia and alcohol, cigarettes and music playing, all designed to set the scene for the exchange. In my approach, this scenery is replaced with dystopia, burning cities, witches, soul stealing, magic and mythology in an attempt to make the tale epic and classical, a story of larger-than-life proportions. Greene describes the quality of epic language as ‘the language of awe’, designed to remind the audience that it is ‘no ordinary story’ (1961: 206). This helps to create tension and struggle, aiming to raise it above the general topic of love and free it from some of the restrictions of writing openly about deeply emotional content. By distancing from the day-to-day reality of love and relationships and moving to this more epic plane the hope is to leave behind the cultural awkwardness and embarrassment associated with the topic.

For me personally, there are a lot of links between mythological imagery and the way that feelings can be amplified by such time-zones and situations, so the layers between the two are very thin as I see them. This is also about the solution to writing about love within the context of hip-hop, avoiding clichés and pitfalls and trying to find original means of expression. As such, the opening lines infer intimacy, potential conflict (‘volatile valentine’) and high drama. 451 Fahrenheit is the temperature at which paper burns, referencing the dystopian Ray Bradbury novel about love and society as well as implying that the words written (and therefore spoken between us) could set fires. That line leads into the ‘dystopian present day’ in the following tercet. The lyric ‘she turns as cities burn looking for a better way’ has the layered meaning of relating to the dystopian imagery, the idea of putting the world to rights late at night, but it is also the literal image of her turning from a window as the sun rises over the city. The sung, final lines of each tercet are linked to the previous two on each occasion normally by two or three-syllable compound rhyme. Each individual rhyming couplet within the tercet serves to further develop the relationship between the two characters, building the sense of awe that the rap verse is displaying for its female counterpart, while also creating feelings of danger, drama or tension – all part

of the heightened feelings of emotion and exhilaration that can be felt at intimate points in a relationship.

Case Study Two: Parenthood, 'Put Your Roots Down' (2014)

'Put Your Roots Down' is interesting as a composition again due to its song structure as much as its content. This piece tells the story of finding out that I was going to be a father and concludes with observations on waiting for the baby to be born. It is written in three distinct sections. The intro and outro of the song are in 3/4 with a simple piano riff and spoken lyrics. This piano part is the baby's musical motif (shown in Figure 5), combined with a poem describing the surrounds in which the story takes place.

In an article on the universal language of lullabies, Perry (2013) observes that triple metre is common to lullabies across the ages:

> Rhythmically, there are shared patterns too. Lullabies are usually in triple metre or 6/8 time, giving them a 'characteristic swinging or rocking motion,' says Sally Goddard Blythe. This is soothing because it mimics the movement a baby experiences in the womb as a mother moves.

In this article Perry goes on to note that as well as the characteristic rocking motion of the 3/4 time-signature, lullabies often contain elements of danger and warning within them. They are noted as serving a purpose of passing on advice on how to live your life, warning of threats but ultimately should be 'rooted in love, tenderness and caring'.

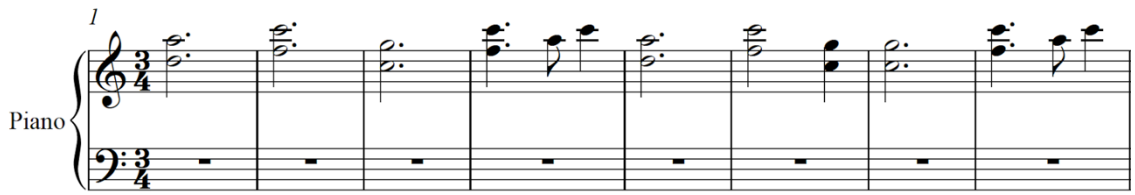

Figure 2: Stanley Odd, 'Put Your Roots Down', musical motif

'Put Your Roots Down' plays with and draws from the format and structure described by Perry. In terms of lyric structure, the song takes a lyrical portraiture approach: drawing the scenery, populating it with characters, then making the characters move.

The introduction sets the scene for the story to take place. It names the actual date of the events, paints a wintery picture of darkness, frost, city dwelling and melancholy or depression. Very often, I explain the background to this song when playing it live. It tells the story of finding out that I was going to be a father on the 3rd of January 2013, still feeling worn out, exhausted and hungover from overindulging during Hogmanay celebrations. Hogmanay is the Scots word for the last day of the year. The extent of the celebrations is perhaps indicated by the fact that in Scotland the national holiday extends to include the 2nd of January as opposed to simply New Year's Day. As such, by the 3rd I was depressed, self-contained and generally inward-looking when my wife simply came into the room and told me she was pregnant.

The surprise of this statement allowed me to create a set-up scenario within the song where the introduction draws the scenery, the chorus utilises a range of images regarding hiding and growing, and the rap verse narrates the actual encounter, ending with the surprise reveal. Rhythmically, the introduction sticks very rigidly to the metrical rhythm of the piano part. The stresses in each line are on the accented beats in each bar. In terms of delivery, the aim of this section is to lock-in with the music while also feeling like normal speech patterns as opposed to a musical 'sing-song' approach. I wanted to have the words become part of the music (the lullaby) without losing their human, emotive content through complete fusion with the music.

3rd of January
Daytime reticence
Night inhales the light
Inside the tenement
Frost graffiti tags
On mural window sills
Darkness heaves and drags
City winter spills
Underneath my skin
In between my ribs
Through my weary heart
Where my breathing lives
Lights off in the close
Chilling solid stone
Lock and bolt the door
But we're not alone

'Put Your Roots Down' Introduction Lyrics

Through the use of imagery depicting long winter nights, coldness and gloom, I attempt to create unwelcoming and disquieting surroundings. Into this I place the last two lines ending: ‘Lock and bolt the door, But we’re not alone’, with all the foreboding and potential threat that this implies. There is clearly a dual meaning here, a much less threatening (but equally daunting) meaning replacing menace with parenthood.

The chorus uses a range of hiding, growing, travelling and baby references to create a collage of these images, embedded with the repeated refrain – ‘Put your roots down’ – directly addressing the unborn child. This section uses layered metaphor to link various domains, cultural references and images to the central images of growth, hiding and pregnancy. Each of these metaphors is rooted to the song title, ‘Put Your Roots Down,’ repeated every fourth bar:

With a Teardrop heartbeat face
A delicate Chrysalid waits
A Flat Stanley stowaway
Put your roots down
An escape artist lying in wait
For an Indian Summer day
Seedling that floats in space
Put your roots down

‘Put Your Roots Down’ Chorus Lyrics

The metaphors here can all be linked to the aforementioned themes. The ‘Teardrop heartbeat face’ refers to the Massive Attack song, ‘Teardrop’ (1998), and its music video. The video is of a fetus in the womb, singing the lyrics to the song. Clearly this refers directly to an unborn child. The key lyric from ‘Teardrop’ – ‘Love, love is a verb, love is a doing word’ – is an additional link for me to the piece and the content of ‘Put Your Roots Down’. The use of Chrysalid as the alternative of chrysalis has the direct meaning of a home in which a creature grows and develops before emerging, but also relates to the John Wyndam novel by the same name. This novel – a dystopian future tale – asks questions of accepting or deriding difference, with topics of children’s development and growth. Hence, the oblique reference to this novel attempts to tie to these themes. ‘A Flat Stanley stowaway’, refers to the children’s books by the same name and the character that could travel inside an envelope. The final images – an escape artist and a seedling floating in space – also cover similar attempts to reframe and connect a wide range of images to the central

themes. ‘An Indian Summer day’ relates to the fact that Calum was born in September. As such, this short section is heavily laden with consistent imagery and metaphor designed to deepen and enhance the connection to the themes of hiding, growth and pregnancy.

The rap verse, as before, becomes more direct, providing a narrative for the more abstract earlier sections. This narrative describes the situation and dialogue between myself and Stella, making observations of how she and I seem during the conversation, with the climax of the section based around my being unaware as to the point of the conversation and her delivering the final line ‘I’m pregnant’.

We could be the only two left alive today
The colours have bled out, chaos lies in wait
And I know it might sound insane, but I can’t get out the way
Of feeling like everything I know is just about to change
As drama condenses from the vapour in the air
She fixes me in place with a cautionary stare
Half solar flare, eyes like glassy marbles
The shocked Manga face of a young lassie startled
She says: 'This isn't how I imagined telling you'
While I'm busy climbing out of the self-pity that I’d fell into
Displaced and equally dazed, brain cerebrally frayed
It’s time to face the demons we’ve chased and switch place to keep them away
I tell her ‘I was 17 when I left home to dance in the wind
And I’ve been doing ma best impression of a man ever since’
She smiles and the room seems brighter by the second
With a grin, I think random acts of kindness are a blessing
I would know her in an abstract artist’s impression
I would consider her my most health of obsessions
I tell her if you’re the answer I’m the question
She laughs then simply says ‘I’m pregnant’

‘Put Your Roots Down’ Rap Verse Lyrics

The direct narrative focuses what has, to this point, been a story that is open to interpretation. In this section, rhetoric is employed in an attempt to create the correct level of emotion taking place between the characters. The opening lines aim to evoke the quiet, still, greyness of early January in Edinburgh, post-Hogmanay celebrations: empty streets, half-light and silence (as seen out my flat window). The ‘only two left alive’ line is also designed to imply that everything else in the world has faded out due to the importance of the exchange. This is hinted at with ‘chaos lies in

wait'. Tension and high drama are called up with the lines 'As drama condenses from the vapour in the air / She fixes me in place with a cautionary stare'. The personification of 'drama' condensing and fixing me in place makes Stella synonymous with drama. It again elevates the story beyond the mundane, creates and implies spectacle. It overtly states performative, theatrical elements of the story.

These techniques are employed to allow me to talk about love and feelings within the hip-hop paradigm. It raises the story and its stakes to a higher point. I try to balance this epic imagery with colloquialism to root the story in a decidedly Scottish environment. The contrast of spectacular, grand imagery such as personifying drama and her stare being 'Half solar flare' are set against the image of 'The shocked Manga face of a young lassie startled'. Here the colloquialism of a young 'lassie' combined with the Manga iconography where larger-than-life eyes can indicate transparent feelings, 'innocence, purity and youth' (Brenner 2007)**,** are utilised to root the story in a contemporary Scottish context and to maintain the emotive personal thread while building the dramatic background. This verse acknowledges a selfishness, wallowing in self-pity and a desire to grow out of that, while also recognising the importance that Stella plays in my ability to do so. The rap is less about the forthcoming life-changing elements of fatherhood and more a declaration of love. It notes a reflection on young adulthood and the process of growing up: 'I tell her "I was 17 when I left home to dance in the wind / And I've been doing ma best impression of a man ever since"'. The final lines set me up for a fall, as I reach for more and more elaborate ways of describing her excellence she cuts through the rhetoric; brings it back to reality; sees through the floral language. 'She laughs then simply says "I'm pregnant"'. Here, irony punctures the hyperbole, re-grounds flights of fantasy, bridges between epic and mundane, aiming to connect the ordinary with emotive intensity.

At the end of the rap verse, the song works in reverse order from its start, returning first to the chorus, then ending with another 3/4 lullaby section, updating the timeline from January to August, describing the move to autumn and the 'nightly fireworks' (of Edinburgh during the International Festival). It evokes the feeling of time dragging and speeding past simultaneously in anticipation of parenthood and flips the initial

brooding threat of ‘Lock and bolt the door, but we’re not alone’ to a situation where the same ‘we’re not alone’ phrase is life-affirming and positive.

September’s on its way
And nightly fireworks chase
Summer heat away
As Autumn lies in wait
Night extends her reach
With arms that greet the day
A sun that doesn’t heat
Thins and seeks the shade
A year on varispeed
Hurry up and wait
A busy passenger
Almost come of age
Is tapping out a code
From amniotic home
Just let us know
That we’re not alone

‘Put Your Roots Down’ Outro Lyrics

Thus, the song itself moves from the implicit danger and darkness to the ‘love, tenderness and caring’ Perry discusses in her article. The central devices are the use of lullaby-style rhythm, the use of hiding and growing imagery, the dual meaning of the phrase ‘we’re not alone’ to move from menacing threat to uplifting positivity, and the storytelling device in the unexpected revelation: ‘I’m pregnant’. The listeners may already know that the female character in the story is pregnant from the information provided but the narrator (me) clearly doesn’t.

Much of this song is poetic. In Culler’s (1997) discussion of Plato’s view of poetry and its purpose, he states that poetry ‘provides a safe outlet for release of intense emotions’, going on to describe Plato’s belief that poetry models the ‘valuable’ experience of passing from ignorance to knowledge. By these definitions, ‘Put Your Roots Down’ is poetic, making use of poetic language, form and structure to express a deeply emotional journey that, at its core, is about going from ignorance to understanding. The journey from ignorance to knowledge is dual, in that it both relates to finding out I was to be a father, and in the sense of the more gradual and continual transition to maturity and responsibility. These emotions and this journey are still expressed through a hip-hop lens in that the rap element still conforms to the structures within hip-hop culture. I would argue that there is sufficient lyrical dexterity,

rhythmical interchange, word-play, metaphor and imagery to locate this song within the hip-hop canon.

Case Study Three: 'Getting mad wae it', Scottish Drinking Culture, 'Carry Me Home' (2012)

'Carry Me Home' is a very personal piece of writing. It chronicles a point in time in my life (late 2011). It documents a process of self-evaluation. It expresses a desire to grow and change. As such, this song fits into the theme of growth, self-expression and emotional output. I wrote this piece in November 2011 in a period of emotional distress. It was the result of a growing sense of the need for significant change in my behaviour, the catalyst for this final-straw-revelation being the band filming me being carried unconscious from the bar of the venue that we had played the previous night. Had this been an isolated incident it might have been humorous but unfortunately it was in-keeping with a catalogue of incidents whereby my behaviour was becoming more out-of-control, fuelled by alcohol and other controlled substances.

The song lyrics are a first-person outpouring that describes being stuck in a self-destructive cycle of consumption; a downward spiral of excess, surviving and recovering through the week only to nosedive again at the weekend. It is easy to write this situation off as self-inflicted, paying the price for hedonism but when you can't stop and it makes you feel so bad in between sessions it becomes a problem that you are not managing. This is about mental health which, in itself, is still a taboo subject in many areas of society. O'Brien, Hunt & Hart (2010)'s research into Scottish men's constructions of masculinity make direct links between issues such as indifference to health, binge drinking culture, and perceived masculinity. However, they also note a change in these attitudes with age and significant life changes such as fatherhood. The song speaks to wider issues of health and concepts of masculinity in Scotland. It takes into account societal relationships to alcohol and drugs, mental health and coping mechanisms.

Writing on alcohol and drug-related illnesses is one of the 'acceptable flaws' in hip-hop culture. It fits within the hyper-masculine construct, related to heavy drinking and excess that conforms to societal preconceptions about manliness. As such rap

content in Scottish hip-hop can often include entire songs dedicated to increasingly hedonistic activities. I have written songs such as this (Join the Club (2012). More generally speaking across society, the sometimes-illicit nature of these activities means that they are often linked to sub- and counter-cultures. When done well, exploring these experiences can lead to some excellent writing, social commentary and documentation, and great music. The purpose of this discussion is neither to criticise this style of writing nor to demonise the activities. Rather, continuing the themes of hip-hop 'growing up', and of personal growth and self-development, this is about reflecting on how priorities change over time and more specifically about my writing at a point of emotional crisis in my life.

Carry Me Home – A Close Reading

The lyrics and music to 'Carry Me Home' were written by me, but the contributions in arrangement, production and performance from the rest of Stanley Odd were invaluable in making the song complete. Instrumentally, it consists mainly of piano and strings with bass and guitar featuring throughout, and drums appearing only for the third verse and outro. The chorus vocals are in a gospel style that add a strong performative, emotive element to the piece. When I originally recorded them myself they were more in the sung/spoken style of Aidan Moffat from Arab Strap, but adding Veronika's voice to this transformed them into a much more lush and powerful force. The general purpose of the song was to express the despair and depression that I was feeling, as well as explaining the reason that I had come to feel this way. It was about working through those problems by writing them down.

In terms of content, I move between self-criticism and ridicule as I reflect on myself. This piece combines serious comment on binge drinking and societal norms with more personal emotional outpouring. The key to this song was being able to include all of the heavy material that I have discussed above whilst also making it an engaging story that people were interested to hear. The piece had to be personal but relatable; to describe a unique experience that nonetheless lots of people can identify and empathise with. For the lyrical analysis of this piece I have employed colour-coding to highlight rhyme schemes and to visually demonstrate song structure.

It's that Handsome Tramp. I weave a spangled dance
As I sift through the wreckage of the aftermath
I woke up to an abandoned camp, a bunch of random bams
And thought 'I'll just have to disband the band'
'When will I, will I be sober?
I can't answer that'
I'm at an all-time low
I hate being a wide-o
And people think seem I'm always taking the Michael
I've no idea where my time goes and I'm in no hurry to find out
I need some time out. Up for too long to climb down
'Cause right now the band are calling me Davie Winehouse
The Comatose Kid
Pass me over some shit that I can overdose with
I'm already half cut hoping no-one's noticed
Salvation held in my enclosed fist to avoid thoughts I won't be left alone with
Carry me home

Carry Me Home, Lyrics to Verse One

Three-syllable rhyme is passed both internally and at the end of each line for the first four bars, painting a picture of destruction and fall out. Phrases such as 'wreckage of the aftermath' and 'abandoned camp' evoke images of emptiness and breakage, while 'random bams' roots the context in Scottish vernacular. 'Bam' is a Scottish term for someone who is disruptive, delinquent or a troublemaker. It comes with class overtones as the term is generally reserved for people from lower or working-class backgrounds. The phrase 'disband the band' links all of this intrinsically to band activities. The line 'When will I be sober? I can't answer that' refers to the *Bros* song from 1987, 'When Will I Be Famous?' In doing so I am mocking myself, acknowledging the problems that I'm having and relating them to a false 'fame' from touring with the band. (Referencing a 1980s boyband is not a 'cool' reference – this is intentional – it's meant to make fun of me.) This is perhaps a very Scottish 'don't get above your station'-type response. The next lines continue to establish the state of despair: the continued use of Scottish colloquialism such as 'wide-o' (meaning someone who is 'wide' i.e. has a cheeky swagger) balances the more ornate language, maintaining the roots of the piece.

This song is a very honest and personal account and as such it is littered with Scots language from everyday life, produced in the vocabulary that I would use to speak normally. Sometimes these words are used for exclusivity and in-jokes. Here they are used as the most direct route to my root, my psyche and to link that to a wider

cultural psyche perhaps. The ‘Davie Winehouse’ line obviously refers to Amy Winehouse, who had passed away in the July of 2011. While a clear play on my name and a link to alcohol and substance abuse (even to ‘rock’n’roll death’), the play on words was not mine, rather it was a name that the band had actually started calling me at the time. The final lines of the first verse again refer to binging, excess and the desire to become inebriated as a way of avoiding facing up to the reality that what I was doing was not good for me. Each verse is broken up with the refrain ‘Carry Me Home’. Verse Two follows:

I descend into the scotch mist
Fueled on cough syrup, I’m a machine with no off switch
But let those who cast the first stone be innocent
Ma sentence is this endless loop that I’m imprisoned in
I’m Sysiphus, the bottle is my boulder
Another drink with the devil walking on my shoulder
I’m a unsteadily disassembling man
Through each raised glass with ma trembling hands
Making deep friends
That fade after the weekend
Exposed and worthless; a broken circuit
Fractured. Damaged goods with no master plan
Trying to heal the break with this plastered cast
Living a triple life of work, band and my wife
Plus I sit at night with a pen, a pad and I write
Going insane, I draw an escape, a door on a page
As I’m going away one thought explodes in my brain

Carry Me Home, Lyrics to Verse Two

The metaphor of a ‘machine with no off switch’ is particularly relevant and poignant here in expressing the feeling of being broken, numb (as machinery can’t feel) and stuck in a cycle of repetition. In terms of dual meaning, in Scottish vernacular, ‘machine’ is often used to express masculinity for a capacity to drink, fight or play a sport. The line ‘My sentence is this endless loop that I’m imprisoned in’ actually creates a feeling of looping around within itself. Placing ‘loop’ halfway through the bar was a lyrical choice. The word ‘endlessness’ would have completed the rhyme but ‘loop’ states what the lyrics just did and punctuates the end of it. Thus, the first half of the line passes rhyming syllables back and forth, creating a looping effect. There is the play on the word ‘sentence’ as the line is my sentence in that I wrote it and that the sentence (punishment, tied to ‘innocent’ from the previous line) is to be imprisoned in a continuum that I can’t escape from.

This theme of punishment and repetition is continued with the reference to Sisyphus, the Greek figure who had to push a rock up a hill for eternity. The first time I heard the story of Sisyphus was in a cartoon called ‘Ulysses 31’ in 1985-86. Episode 7 of this children’s series, ‘The Eternal Punishment’, retells the ancient Greek tale. It has obviously had a significant effect on me as I still remember it vividly. In this way, there are multiple examples within this text of me performing a reminiscence exercise. From the pop culture Bros reference in the first verse to classical Sisyphus here, I have included elements within the song that on certain levels are for me only. They are formative childhood memories and references embedded within the song.

The following lines expand on a theme of coming to pieces (‘disassembling man’) and the feeling of connection at the time of being high followed by the emptiness of coming down. A series of metaphors in short phrases build up the images of being broken down. The fracture in one line leads into ‘Trying to heal the break with this plastered cast’. Clearly there is double meaning again here of a plaster-cast being used to protect a broken limb and the futility of getting drunk and revelling again to try to fix the problems that this caused in the first place. The final lines of verse two acknowledge the very different areas of my life and how I have tried to maintain them by keeping them separate. The verse finishes by recognising the importance of the process of writing in making sense of and escaping from the situation (“a door on a page”).

Verse three moves towards a conclusion, through increased rhythmical interplay, wordplay and continued self-deconstruction:

> Brain cells fade like an unfinished symphony
> I find that head injuries make the best similes
> I’m fast diminishing my anonymity
> Through random infamy, nimbly I deconstruct the mimicry
> The thinly veiled self-loathing I assimilate
> Means my most vociferous supporter’s got it in for me
> And all that equates to a loud mouth drunk
> Less classy than Class A
> The last flashing synapse fades
> Amid the mashed state of a trashed brain
> Which translates to last place in this rat race

The grey matter heats up as I try and think
Aches at the back of my skull ‘til I’m supplied with drink
I got ma carry out, had a lock in
Now I’m being carried out, please somebody stop this

Carry Me Home, Lyrics to Verse Three

Opening with the simile ‘Brain cells fade like an unfinished symphony’, this refers to the literal damage caused to brain cells from alcohol consumption but also develops imagery of incompleteness, of never reaching or achieving potential. The following line takes up the three-syllable word ‘symphony’ and ties to it internally and at the end of the following line over four syllables with ‘I find that head injuries make the best similes’. This one line performs many roles. It refers to the actual simile in the previous line. Therefore, this lyric is observing that the very act of losing brain cells has provided a beautiful simile. It also refers to the increased likelihood of injury when inebriated. Furthermore, this line is a comment on how being out of control and drunk helps to construct the ‘tortured artist’ persona. It is additionally a comment on how being in this state provides song-writing material. Finally, it considers all these factors but is ultimately self-mocking, ridiculing the fact that I am trying to excuse my behaviour as some sort of artistic process.

Tension builds as the three syllables of ‘symphony’ became four syllables in ‘head injuries’ and ‘best similes’, moving to five syllables that dominate almost whole lines in ‘fast diminishing my anonymity, through random infamy’, then back to three syllables in ‘nimbly I deconstruct the mimicry’. The density of rhyme in this section helps to build immediacy. The last line is an overt recognition that I am taking apart my own pretence at being a ‘tortured artist’. Essentially, I accuse myself of ‘faking it’ or just playing a part. The ‘random infamy’ is consistent with an opposing view to the ‘famous’ references in verse one.

The ‘thinly veiled self-loathing’ meaning my ‘most vociferous supporter’s got it in for me’ continue the rhyme scheme. They are intentionally loquacious and amount to admitting to the internal contradictions of self-promotion versus negative self-image. The following line ‘And all this equates to a loud mouth drunk’ is stated as simply as the previous line was verbose. It is an intentional counter to the ornate language, designed to literally cut through the mask of effusive words; to deflate the hyperbole.

Note that the line doesn’t rhyme either. It is a complete break in the flow that had been building to this point.

Finally, the piece ends linking all this to the song’s title, key theme and to the actual, literal event that led to its being written. The ‘carry **out’,** a Scots phrase for a bag of alcoholic drinks, results in a ‘lock **in**’ i.e., staying in a pub after closing time. I am then ‘carried out’: literally carried unconscious from the building. The final line is a genuine appeal for help and an expression of the will to change; to end the cycle: ‘Please somebody stop this’. Verse three is only 14 bars long, two bars short of a standard 16. There is something missing from the verse itself. There is also a space for something new/else.

Some of my most deeply autoethnographic self-interrogation has had to take place with ‘Carry Me Home’, as it is coming from a place of emotional crisis. It is one of the least controlled emotional expressions; the most driven and needy. Studying myself retrospectively and autoethnographically, I felt that I had to write this; that I had no choice. It was a very cathartic experience and process that felt psychologically important. It formed a pivotal point and crucial part of continued recovery and repair in its composition, its sharing and release, and its repeated performance for 12 months after its writing. It doesn't define me. I have moved past this place (but still have the propensity to go back). I don't play the song any more. Discussing and analysing it here is the first time I've revisited it in a long time.

Conclusion

To summarise, this analysis is concerned with personal reflection and growth both in and through song writing within a hip-hop template. The pieces analysed are personal ruminations on age-old universal themes. They tell of individual incidents that virtually everyone goes through. They involve looking inward and describing what you see and feel, as opposed to looking outward and around you. The pieces necessitate a drive for self-discovery and growth, articulating attempts to grow-up, progress, change or understand myself better. Sometimes they unburden by sharing. On other occasions, as discussed by Forman (2014), they mark situations or times in life, allowing for reflection and unpacking their meaning, significance and

repercussions. As Davis (1985) notes, it is the universality in the experiences described that makes them of any interest to someone else, the empathy and association. Perhaps recognition and expression of universal experience is ultimately an antidote to the ‘outsiderdom’ that hip-hop often champions, and that I am often drawn to.

Close reading of the lyrics in this article provides examples of my attempting to write about commonly expressed feelings or human situations in an original way. In each one of the pieces, the music is very relevant and specific to the lyrics. Each piece of music has been written to enhance and augment the lyrical sentiment, hence the need to include a musicological perspective—both for the musical ‘beat’ and lyrical patternings. Often the means to make the universal original involves a postmodern approach of exploiting familiar tropes to heighten the sense of fracture—or rupture, as Rose (1994), would have it and differences of the contemporary narratives built around them. ‘Put Your Roots Down’ does this with the 3/4 lullaby section and the darkening imagery ending on a play on words ‘but we’re not alone’. The poetical nature of the lyrics is demonstrated in that each song reaches a point in the story that reveals an unknown, challenges a perception or contrasts an assumption. Thus, there are tiered actions taking place within the writing regarding self-reflexion and referencing.

The layered linkages between the music, words and images for these songs provide different levels with which to engage them. The songs have to work on the ‘top’ layer i.e., they must be musical and interesting. The subsequent layers are there to strengthen, enhance and extend their meaning and content. Some of the additional elements and linkages might not reach any listeners other than myself and I am content for this to be the case. I like assigning meaning and layers to my work without feeling the need for all of them to be a part of the listener’s experience. From the analysis of this, it has become clear that writing these pieces is not something that is only designed to benefit an intended audience, but that I myself am also the audience; also getting something from both the process and the output. To borrow Evidence’s word from the opening of this article, it is personally ‘rewarding’. In each song, there is either an implied or an explicit admission of foolishness. In ‘Day 3’ that is found in the imagery of fixing me, drawing my soul through missing teeth and

admitting defeat; in ‘Put Your Roots Down’ the concept of my rhetoric being brought back to reality by her revelation, and of self-pity; in Carry Me Home the entire song is a catalogue of flaws.

This article has been concerned with the processes of growing up in hip-hop and documenting that creatively. As discussed, hip-hop as a genre has been criticised for lacking emotional depth at times. But, again, this is hip-hop reflecting and embodying wider culture—these issues could equally be levied at accepted norms of masculinity in wider society. As a genre widely (often rightly) criticised as male dominated and gender imbalanced, its hyper-masculine elements reflect a narrow societal view of masculinity that marginalises and silences women but also does men a disservice. The same social constructs that imply men should not cry or show weakness, and that binge drinking is a demonstration of manliness, manifest in the boundaries of acceptable expression within hip-hop. Therefore, good writing becomes about how you negotiate these cultural and generic norms, whilst trying to break from them – the pulling in different directions, subversions and challenges, stresses and fractures, causing hairline cracks that can lead to fissures, splitting open the concrete walls of generic and societal boundaries.

References

Abrahms, L. and Ewan, E., 2017. *Nine Centuries of Man: Manhood and Masculinity in Scottish History*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Appiah, K. A., 2007. Does Truth Matter to Identity?. In: J. J. E. Gracia, ed. *Race or Ethnicity?: On Black and Latino Identity.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 19-27.

Anderson, L. 2006. Analytic Autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 35(4). pp. 373-396.

Bochner, A.P. and Ellis, C. (2003) An Introduction to the Arts and Narrative Research: Art as Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry.* 9(4), pp.506-514.

Bradley, R. N., 2015. Barbz and kings: explorartions of gender and sexuality in hip-hop. In: J. A. Williams, ed. *The Cambridge Compansion to Hip-Hop.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 181-191.

Chrystall, M., 2012. *Inverness tribute from Stanley Odd.* [Online] Available at: http://www.highland-news.co.uk/Whats-On/Music/Inverness-tribute-from-Stanley-Odd-20092012.htm [Accessed 27 June 2017].

Coffey, A., 1999. *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity.* London: Sage.

Culler, J., 1997. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davis, S., 1985. *The Craft of Lyric Writing.* Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books.

Deuchar, R. & Holligan, C., 2014. What does it mean to be a man? Psychosocial undercurrents in the voices of incarcerated (violent) Scottish teenage offenders. *Criminology & Criminal Justice,* 12 August, 15(2), pp. 361-377.

Drever, R., 2008. *GZA/Genius @ ABC, 12 Nov.* [Online] Available at: http://www.theskinny.co.uk/music/live-music/reviews/gza-genius-abc-12-nov-event_review [Accessed 27 June 2017].

Dyson, M. E., 2012. ‘Cover Your Eyes as I Describe a Scene So Violent’ Violence, Machismo, Sexism, and Homophobia. In: M. Forman & M. A. Neal, eds.

That's The Joint! Hip-Hop Studies Reader. New York: Routledge, pp. 358-369.

Forman, M., 2014. Visualizing place, representing age in hip-hop: converging themes in Scarface's 'My Block'. *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies,* 28(2), pp. 300-313.

Homberg-Schramm, J., 2018 *"Colonised by Wankers": Postcolonialism and Contemporary Scottish Fiction*. Cologne: Modern Academic Publishing.

Gates Jr, H. L., 1988. *The Signifyin' Monkey.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greene, T., 1961 The Norms of Epic. *Comparative Literature*. Vol. 13, No. 3, pp.193-207.

Krims, A., 2000. *Rap music and the poetics of identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacAlister, E., 2012. *Live Review: Stanley Odd at Stereo, 20/9/12.* [Online]
Available at: http://ravechild.co.uk/2012/09/25/live-review-stanley-odd-at-stereo-20912/
[Accessed 27 June 2017].

Marshall, W., 2006. Giving Up Hip-hop's Firstborn: A Quest for the Real after the Death of Sampling. *Callaloo,* 29(3), pp. 868-892.

Morgan, J. & Neal, M. A., 2006. A Brand-New Feminism. In: *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop.* New York: BasicCivitas, pp. 233-246.

National Records Scotland, 2012. *Life expectancy in Scotland, the UK and Europe.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/life-expectancy-areas-in-scotland/2010-2012/html/life-expectancy-for-areas-within-scotland-2010-2012-scotland-uk-europe.html
[Accessed 27 June 2017].

Neal, M.A., 2013. *Looking for Leroy, Illegible Black Masculinities*. New York: New York University Press

O'Brien, R., Hunt, K. & Hart, G., 2009. 'The average Scottish man has a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, lying there with a portion of chips': prospects for change in Scottish men's constructions of masculinity and their health-related beliefs and behaviours. *Critical Public Health,* September-December, 19(3-4), pp. 363-381.

People's Party With Talib Kweli, 2019. *Evidence Talks Dilated Peoples Origin, Kanye And His Eminem 'Beef'*. [Podcast] 12 August 2019. Available at https://open.spotify.com/show/72bYFZBBZIwc7kdYUmRgFe (Accessed: 9th October 2019).

Perry, N., 2013. *The universal language of lullabies.* [Online] Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21035103 [Accessed 27 June 2017].

Rose, T., 2008. *The Hip-Hop Wars.* New York: Basic Books.

Speers, L., 2017. *Hip-Hop Authenticity and the London Scene: Living Out Authenticity in Popular Music.* Oxon: Routledge.

Stokes, M., 1994. Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music. In: M. Stokes, ed. *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place.* Oxford: Berg Publishers, pp. 1-28.