MUSIC, MADNESS, & THE MAINSTREAM: THE COMMUNICATION OF BIPOLAR DISORDER IN THE ART AND RECEPTION OF KANYE WEST & MARIAH CAREY

by

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"But in the end, stories are about one person saying to another: This is the way it feels to me. Can you understand what I'm saying? Does it feel this way to you?"

- *Kazuo Ishiguro, "My Twentieth Century Evening and Other Small Breakthroughs"*

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Abstract

Ye (formerly known as Kanye West) and Mariah Carey are two of the biggest stars of popular music. While they have both earned vast amounts of critical and commercial success throughout their respective careers, this has been accompanied by the development of notorious star personas that have labeled each artist as “difficult.” There is also a gendered dimension to these personas; Carey is known for her diva behaviour and demands, while Ye is characterized by his ego and arrogance. Both artists have also been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. In this thesis, I consider the ways that these star personas interact with the common cliché of the “tortured genius,” how this compounds the lived experience of bipolar disorder, and the different intersectional challenges that arise when considering the gender disparity of the notion of genius. By drawing on scholarship from both disability studies and musicology, I aim to closely analyze the music and public perception of both Carey and Ye in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how popular music acts as a framework for communicating the complexity of bipolar disorder.

List of Abbreviation and Symbols Used

MBDTF	*My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*
EoM	*The Emancipation of Mimi*
DSM	*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*
TRL	*Total Request Live*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was twenty-one years old, I told a lie that changed my life. One this particular night, I'd put in a shift of about four or five hours – from maybe 10:00 pm to 3:00 am – of late-night retooling of the capstone project of my undergraduate degree. I was months away from finishing. I stared at my laptop screen in the dark of my bedroom for all that time as a burst of creativity had overtaken me and I'd just had to stay up to exercise it. Finally, I figured it was time to try to get some sleep.

Except, how was I supposed to sleep when I was on such a roll? I couldn't just let the creative energy I had go to waste. So, I ended up spending the next three hours writing music. I felt an intense sense of accomplishment undercut by a middling level of wariness that the clock was ticking ever-closer to daybreak.

By 6:00 am, I thought I might as well stay up to watch the sunrise at 7:10. I'd never seen it before and, in retrospect, I almost tricked myself into thinking it was a choice I'd made prior to an hour before and not one borne out of twenty-four straight hours of wakefulness.

Soon enough, it was time. I crept out of my bedroom, stood by the nearly floor-to-ceiling window on the eastern wall of my apartment, and watched for about a half hour as the city woke up around me. The sunrise is beautiful, who knew! I remember my earlier sense of wariness beginning to creep back in, as I thought even at my most productive and energetic I'd never stayed awake to watch the sun rise on a second day. But I dismissed those qualms easily enough.

At around 7:45, I called my mom to say good morning. She answered the FaceTime call and the first thing she said was "what's wrong?"

She knows my ideal day starts at 10:00 am, and upon seeing my face so early in the morning, my mother assumed there was something deeply amiss about the scene. I instantly

recalibrated. I told her I'd just had the worst time trying to sleep through a migraine and ended up just staying awake. My mom expressed the usual sympathy, talked to me for a while, and eventually said goodbye with my promise that I'd try to get some rest now.

Lying to my mom, hearing someone express that there was actually something fundamentally abnormal about what I was doing as compared to my typical patterns, and feeling a compulsive *need* to lie to a loved one in order to protect them (or myself) from the truth of my behaviour, brought about an intense guilt and a real wake up call.

I thought back to some of my actions over the last several months (and years) of my life. I thought about how I'd always considered myself an incredibly passionate person able to commit to working on creative endeavors for long periods of time without needing to take breaks. Just that past summer, I'd gone a full day without eating or drinking in order to voraciously play guitar, and I thought that made me a very dedicated musician. The day that I woke up at 8:00 am, went to the gym for an hour followed by a very long walk about my neighbourhood, cleaned my entire apartment top to bottom, did all the homework I had on the docket for the week and then thought, "I might as well clean the oven on my hands and knees for two hours" was the day I expressed to my roommate that this must be what people without depression felt like *all the time*.

When I was diagnosed with persistent depressive disorder at the age of seventeen, it made sense for what I had been feeling at the time. I thought that the depression was the hindrance to the passion and focus that was my true self that remained in the periods of what I believed to be stability. When I was diagnosed with cyclothymia (also called bipolar III) in the summer after I finished my undergrad, it was both a relief and not at all surprising.

Growing up, I found great solace in music that spoke to the emotional experiences that I felt I was navigating alone. The symptoms of my mental illness started when I was ten years old, and though I come from a family that is remarkably open about mental health and its treatment, I felt so very isolated. I turned to music in order to reach out to something bigger than me to surmise what was going on in my head. In retrospect, many of the artists I listened to growing up were also living with bipolar disorder. I didn't necessarily know that then, but I understood the power that connecting to that music on that particular level was having on me and would continue to have on me to this day. Ultimately, this is what I believe to be the necessity of this thesis. There are people in the world who, like me and any other person living with mental illness, are painstakingly seeking to articulate the complexities of their experience and they are worthy of the time it takes to understand them.

The way that I can offer understanding is through my own individual skill set, which is that of musicological research and the minor in psychology that I obtained alongside my undergraduate degree. Thus, my thesis analyzes the music and reception of two of the most visible celebrities who are open about their diagnoses of bipolar disorder in an effort to understand the myriad ways in which the experience of bipolar disorder can be communicated: rapper-producer Ye[1] and pop songstress Mariah Carey.

Research problem

Ye and Carey are undoubtedly superstars of contemporary popular music, with a combined 380 million records sold worldwide, multiple awards, and overwhelming critical

[1] Formerly known professionally by his birth name, Kanye West, Ye (no middle or last name) legally changed his name in 2021. For the sake of clarity and consistency, he will be referred to as Ye in the text of this thesis. In footnotes and references, sources that identify Ye by his birth name (including discographic sources) do so because of the timing of their release/publication.

acclaim. Each has a reputation for being "difficult," in ways that intersect with gender stereotypes: Ye is known for egocentricity and grandiose pronouncements, and Carey for "diva" expectations and arrogance. These public personas are underscored by the artists' diagnoses of bipolar disorder, a mental illness that has historically been mistreated and misrepresented in both medical literature and common parlance.

In my research, I consider Ye and Mariah Carey as case studies in an investigation of bipolar disorder and ideologies of "genius" in music. The tortured genius is an enduring artistic cliché, and from Beethoven to Kurt Cobain the notion of musical genius as divine madness is associated above all with white men.[2] Men recognized as geniuses are permitted a degree of madness, and bad behaviour is indulged — and even encouraged — as a component of their artistry. Conversely, a woman's madness is seen as detracting from her creative accomplishments and may make it impossible to see her as a truly "great" artist at all. In comparing Ye and Carey, I aim to critique the gender disparity in conversations about genius in art as it relates specifically to bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder: an overview

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder (divided into bipolar I, bipolar II, and cyclothymia) characterized by moods that fluctuate between manic (or hypomanic) and depressive states with limited periods of stability in between. A manic episode is a period of time in which a person's mood is especially elevated and wherein the individual has an increased level of energy. Symptoms of a manic episode include an inflated sense of self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, racing thoughts, an increase in goal-directed activity, excessive involvement in risk-taking

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[2] Philip Ewell, "Beethoven Was an Above Average Composer - Let's Leave It at That." *Music Theory's White Racial Frame*, April 24, 2020.

behaviours, and pressure to keep talking.[3] The manic episode must last at least a week. By contrast, a hypomanic episode has many of the same symptoms as a manic episode but they are often less severe in nature and usually last up to four days. Mania and hypomania can also include symptoms of psychosis, a detachment from reality that often includes paranoia, delusions, and auditory or visual hallucinations. While bipolar I is characterized by the presence of mania and bipolar II is distinguished by the presence of hypomania, both include symptoms of a major depressive episode in their diagnostic criteria. The symptoms of a major depressive episode include the presence of five or more of the following in a two-week period: feelings of sadness and hopelessness, lack of interest or pleasure in most day-to-day activities, significant weight loss or loss of appetite, insomnia, either restlessness or sluggishness, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, diminished cognitive capacity, and recurrent suicidal ideation or attempts.[4] Cyclothymia is diagnosed when the patient experiences fluctuations in mood that embody many symptoms of depression and hypomania without explicitly meeting the criteria for major depression or a full hypomanic episode.

Contextualizing the artists

Other than being two of the most critically and commercially successful pop music stars of all time, Ye and Carey may seem rather different considering their musical output. However, upon closer inspection the two artists share several common life threads. Both raised by single mothers who fostered in them an early appreciation for the arts, they fell in love with hip-hop production and songwriting. These early influences, coupled with a strong work ethic and industry connections, catapulted them into stratospheric levels of fame. From their shared view

[3] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2016), 124.
[4] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 133.

at the top of the pop mountain, Carey and Ye also have another major life experience in common; that is, their bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder frequently prohibits an individual from fully participating in life. It can alter the person's day-to-day routines and impact their ability to predict their emotional response to stimuli. This is exacerbated for people in the public eye, like Carey and Ye. Here, I provide biographical information on each artist's early life, their careers, and the basics of their experiences with bipolar disorder.[5]

Early lives

Ye and Carey share many similarities in their early lives that have paved the way for the development of their artistry. In particular, their respective relationships with their mothers, as well as early relationships to music and language, help to clarify the ways in which the two stars are similar.

Mariah Carey was born on March 27th, 1969, on Long Island, New York. Her mother, Patricia Carey, was a professional opera singer and recognized her daughter's natural vocal ability very early on in her life. As a result, she began giving her daughter vocal lessons at age four and introducing her to professional musicians. Carey wrote poetry as a child, often to cope with the stress present in her homelife; she grew up the target of racism due to being biracial, and her parents divorced when she was only three years old. In addition, she sang melodies to herself throughout her life and made up lullabies before bed. However, it wasn't until the professional tutelage of her mother that she realized that if she combined her love of language and melody with her gift of singing, that meant she was writing songs.

Less than a decade later and a few states south, Ye was born on June 8th, 1977, in Atlanta, Georgia. Raised in Chicago, Illinois, his parents divorced when he, too, was only three

[5] See Appendix for a timeline of major events pertaining to the lives of Ye and Carey.

years old. Both of his parents were deeply involved in the arts. Ye's mother, Dr. Donda West, was an accomplished English professor who served as the Chair of the English Department at Chicago State University for twenty-four years. His father, Ray West, was one of the first Black photojournalists at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. The influence of Ye's mother on his career is impossible to overstate. Not only did she retire from teaching to become Ye's manager once his music career took off, but her philosophy in raising him has played a major role in Ye's steadfast passion for his art. In her memoir, *Raising Kanye: Life Lessons from the Mother of a Hip-Hop Superstar*, Dr. West writes, "There is no room for shyness. I raised him that way, to think critically and analytically and not be afraid to voice what you feel. I helped shape that. I think leaders are people who must do that."[6]

Carey and Ye's early lives were marked by familial strife. However, it is from this strife that they were able to forge key experiences with art that lay the groundwork for their careers. They were both raised by single mothers who guided them into the arts, and pushed them to strive for excellence in their music.

Careers

In addition to their similar upbringings, Mariah Carey and Ye share a notable passion and dedication to their craft as songwriters and performers. This, alongside their reverence for soul and hip-hop music, imbues them both with a level of creative control and a unique perspective in creating what have been called some of the best pop songs of the 21st century.

"Vision of Love" (1990), the lead single from Carey's eponymous debut album, was a critical and commercial hit and a precursor of success to come. The song establishes many of the

[6] Margena A. Christian, "Dr. Donda West tells how she shaped son to be a leader in 'Raising Kanye,'" *Jet Magazin*e, May 14, 2007.

trademarks of Carey's style, including "a strong soul vocal style that exuded exuberance through its wide register,"[7] themes of love and devotion, and an emphasis on melisma that would not only define Carey but also the vocal landscape of pop music throughout the 1990s.

Carey worked for many years behind the scenes before her arrival as a full-fledged pop star, recording demos and backing vocals for other artists at age twelve and well into her teenage years. She eventually grew tired of singing the words of others and worked to put together a demo reel of her own self-written songs. She was subsequently courted with a recording contract from head of Columbia records, Tommy Mottola in 1988. There was an important stipulation that the young Carey insisted upon:

> There was a moment where I was able to say 'If I do this, I don't want to be forced to do other people's material. So, you, please incorporate that into your fabulous contract…' that was the one thing. I should have said so many other things…but at least I still own my catalogue. (Genius, 2018, 16:17-16:40)

This necessity for creative control was unorthodox for female pop stars of the era, but came to define Carey even throughout the ups and downs of her career.

With her fifth album *Daydream* (1995), Carey further explored her sonic influences and 1997's *Butterfly* is the album that Carey considers her artistic peak. However, the critical and commercial failure of *Glitter* (2001) marked the beginning of a challenging time in Carey's personal and professional life. The film *Glitter* (2001) and its soundtrack were meant to be showcases for Carey's varied talents, and the music was a sonic departure from her previous work. However, the 80s pastiche of the album was maligned by critics and the album became Carey's worst performing to date. Following a hospitalization for exhaustion, which I will discuss shortly, this time in Carey's life led to fears that perhaps her career had come to an end.

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[7] Stan Hawkins, "Mariah Carey," in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Popular Musicians Since 1990*, eds. Stephen Wasserstein, Ken Wachsberger, & Tanya Laplante (Detroit: Schirmer Reference, 2004), 116.

These fears were laid to rest with *The Emancipation of Mimi* (2005). Critics praised the album's celebratory tone and Carey's vocal prowess. It debuted at #1 in the US and was Carey's first album to do so since *Butterfly*. The album signaled a return to form for Carey. In re-establishing herself as a bankable pop star, Carey was able to release a slew of albums, all to positive reviews and commercial success. In the four years between her 2014 release *Me. I am Mariah… The Elusive Chanteuse* and 2018's *Caution*, Carey would deal with a bout of negative mental health that would cause her personal life to take precedence over her professional. Even through the stratospheric highs and unpredictable lows of Carey's career, her commitment to challenging herself artistically is admirable. Even when not critically well-received, her willingness to use her creative control to experiment sonically and aesthetically has given her the kind of career longevity sought after by many but enjoyed by few.

If Ye believes himself to be a superhero as he has espoused on several tracks, most notably on 2010's "POWER" ("screams from the haters, got a nice ring to it / I guess every superhero need his theme music,")[8] then he needs an origin story. That origin story is his debut single, 2003's "Through the Wire." Prior to being signed to Jay-Z's Roc-A-Fella Records, Ye was an in-demand producer known for his innovative approach to beat-making. He was still trying to prove himself as a credible rapper when, while driving home from a late-night recording session in Los Angeles in 2002, Ye's car was in a head-on collision with another. His jaw was broken in three places, he had reconstructive surgery, and his jaw was wired shut for several weeks. Coodie, a close friend of Ye who documented his career for years says, "It felt like everything he'd worked so hard for was over."[9] Ye made the decision to record "Through the

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[8] "POWER," track #3 on Kanye West, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Def Jam Recordings and Roc-A-Fella Records, 2010, 0:18-0:24.
[9] *Jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy*, episode 2, "Act II: Purpose," directed by Coodie and Chike Ozah, aired February 22, 2022, on Netflix.

Wire," a song about his near-fatal accident, and he did so while his jaw was still wired shut. Appearing on Ye's debut album *The College Dropout* (2004), it served as the entry point for a trio of successful albums that would catapult Ye into mainstream success as both a producer and a rapper in his own right.

Much in the same way as Carey, Ye has exercised an impressive level of creative control over his catalogue throughout his career. He has been involved in the songwriting and production of nearly every track in his discography. Very soon into his career, Ye gained a reputation for having an inflated ego and a level of arrogance that eventually proved too much for the general public. *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2010) is billed as Ye's "backhanded apology," and with the bare-bones and industrial *Yeezus* (2013) and the gospel-influenced *The Life of Pablo* (2016), Ye continued to challenge expectations of him as an artist when it comes to genre and aesthetic. A period of personal upheaval would define the following years of Ye's career, and set the stage for an in depth look at his experiences with bipolar disorder.

Both Carey and Ye cut their teeth working behind the scenes in the music industry before they were able to prove their worth as artists in their own right. Yet, once they did, they managed to exercise impressive control over both the musical and aesthetic parts of their respective work.

Experiences with bipolar disorder

Mirroring the diverse experiences found in the general population that lives with bipolar disorder, Ye and Mariah Carey have vastly different experiences when it comes to the treatment of their mental health. While both of the stars were diagnosed after a period of psychiatric hospitalization that came as a result of very public mental breakdowns, the way that each of them chose to confront the realities of that diagnosis differs significantly. In addition, both Ye and

Carey have expressed competing opinions on the usefulness of pharmaceutical medication and alternative medicine in the treatment of their bipolar disorder. Despite the differences to be found in their early experiences with the disorder, the timelines of Ye's and Carey's mental health journeys converge in 2018.

When Carey paid a visit to the set of MTV's *Total Request Live* in the summer of 2001, the appearance was immediately noted for her bizarre mannerisms and erratic speech. Days later, Carey uploaded a cryptic voice message to her personal website that stated that what she wanted most in life was a single day off. She wasn't sure what was happening around her anymore and felt run down. It was in the next few weeks that she was hospitalized for extreme physical and emotional exhaustion, and where she was ultimately diagnosed with bipolar II. However, this is not when Carey began treatment for her bipolar disorder. From 2001 to 2016, Carey continued to live untreated. She experienced the telltale signs of hypomanic episodes characteristic of bipolar II, overworking herself constantly, convincing herself she had insomnia or was simply a workaholic, before she would hit a wall and experience symptoms of depression. After a period in the late 2010s wherein Carey experienced what she calls "the hardest couple of years [she's] been through,"[10] she realized she could no longer function in the way she had been and she sought professional help. Carey says she now relies on a combination of medication and therapy, as well as a deeper commitment to spirituality and daily practices like exercise and healthy eating. However, she says the best thing she does to maintain her mental stability is make music. Indeed, six months after her *People* magazine cover story declaring her diagnosis with bipolar II Carey released *Caution*.

When Ye took the stage to accept the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award for his impact on music video and pop culture at the 2015 MTV Video Music Awards, he launched into

[10] Jess Cagle, "Mariah Carey: 'It's Time to Finally Share My Story'," *People*, April 23, 47.

a meandering speech lasting over 10 minutes that ended with him professing "...as you probably could have guessed by this moment, I have decided in 2020 to run for president."[11] As the crowd erupted, Ye appeared euphoric. By the next year, in 2016, that euphoria could be recontextualized as mania as Ye publicly experienced a swift decline in mood. He began to express suicidal thoughts frequently and publicly, and on stage at a concert in November of 2016 he expressed fear that his friends in the music industry were going to send people to kill him for sharing that he supported Donald Trump. Ye was swiftly checked into a mental health treatment facility. The rest of Ye's scheduled tour was cancelled and he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. He was prescribed medication to control his mood as well as the symptoms of psychosis he was experiencing. Ye has spoken at length about the "cruel and primitive"[12] treatment he endured while hospitalized. He says he was handcuffed to a gurney, heavily medicated, and isolated from his loved ones, which he feels is counterproductive when a patient is already experiencing the fear associated with paranoid delusions. Ye also says that he is much more favourable to forms of treatment outside of medication, which he feels dulls his creative process. He relies heavily on his relationship to religion as well as bright light immersion therapy.

Despite differences in the ways Ye and Carey approach treatment of bipolar disorder, both have stressed the positive impact that making music has had on their mood. Due to the platform provided to them by their roles as stars of popular music, they are able to unpack complex emotional situations and the symptomatic presentation of their illness.

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[11] Gil Kaufman, "Here's The Full Transcript Of Kanye's Incredible VMA Vanguard Speech," August 31, 2015, *MTV*, https://www.mtv.com/news/zy7l4e/kanye-west-video-vanguard-acceptance-speech-full.

[12] *My Next Guest Needs No Introduction with David Letterman*, season 2, episode 1, "Kanye West," directed by Michael Steed, aired May 31, 2019, on Netflix.

Outlining my thesis

I find it important to clarify the scope of my research problem and articulate what it is *not*. The subjects of my case studies, Ye and Carey are at times rather controversial figures. Both have received their share of public vitriol throughout their decades-long careers, some of it warranted. In particular, Ye has been held to task for racist and anti semitic remarks in recent years; his words have undoubtedly incited hatred. It is not my goal in this research to give this kind of hate speech or the person espousing it any more of a platform. Rather, I aim to focus on how broader public reception to Ye is filtered through the lens of his transparency regarding his mental health journey. I am also not aiming to decide who and what the "best" or "most accurate" representation of bipolar disorder in popular music might be. My reason for investigating Ye and Carey is their level of fame coupled with their candor regarding their mental health. Regardless of my objections to his personal beliefs, Ye remains a relevant companion case study to Carey when considering genius in music, gender, public perception, and bipolar disorder.

In chapter 2, I provide a history of bipolar disorder from the late 18th to mid-19th century wherein I cover the disorder's origins and major developments in its diagnosis and treatment. Simultaneously, I provide key examples in a timeline of "performed madness" — that is, artistic performances from the same time period that sought to express the symptoms (either real or perceived) of mental illness as they were understood at the time. In this chapter, I also introduce the concept of the "tortured genius" and highlight how it further informs perception of the mentally ill. This chapter functions to articulate the historical precedent for public perception toward bipolar disorder as well as illuminate some of the ways in which mental illness was

communicated artistically, showing the ways that both these threads connect to my present-day case studies experiences of their mental health and musicality.

In chapter 3, I explore how Ye and Carey each communicate their experiences with bipolar disorder musically through techniques of vocality. In both chapters 3 and 4, I have narrowed my scope to the analysis of two albums from each artist. In the case of Ye, I have selected his 2010 album, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (hereafter abbreviated as *MBDTF*) and his 2018 album, *ye*. For Carey, it's 2005's *The Emancipation of Mimi* (*EoM*) and her 2018 album, *Caution*. In chapter 3, I compare and contrast the albums' generic vocality, the delivery of their lyrics, and the audibility of the artists' voices against the instrumental production and consider what these elements might reveal about Ye and Carey's experiences of bipolar disorder.

In chapter 4, I delve deeper into the public perception of Ye and Carey respectively. I highlight the "genius" vs. "diva" dichotomy between Ye and Carey and further extrapolate how public perception toward celebrity impacts self-perception, and ultimately impacts willingness to seek treatment for bipolar disorder. Once again turning to the aforementioned albums, I analyze how an increased self-awareness of their public personas manifests as musical self-referentiality for both Ye and Carey, and how such self-referentiality can be understood in the context of their mental health.

In chapter 5, my conclusion, I summarize my previous arguments. I then illustrate the usefulness of my particular framework of analysis if applied to the music of other artists who are candid about their experiences with bipolar disorder and related mental health conditions. In further connecting my work to my own personal narrative, I also wish to reiterate my central argument of the importance of connecting to the art that makes us feel seen through shared emotional experience.

Chapter 2: The History of Bipolar Disorder and the Performance of Madness, late 18th to mid-19th century

Introduction

The history of bipolar disorder is fraught with tension and built upon a foundation of misinformation. Through this haze – both because of and in spite of it – the disorder has seen a great deal of evolution from the late 18th century onward. In order to arrive at present-day conceptions of bipolar disorder, in terms of everything from initial diagnosis and public perception to treatment through practices such as institutionalization and pharmaceutical control, it is necessary to highlight the major points throughout the last several hundred years that inform where we are today. I begin this chapter by framing my understanding of the myth of the "tortured genius" in order to help contextualize both the following subsections of the chapter. The following subheading traces major developments in the history of bipolar disorder from the late 18th century to the mid-19th century, mainly focusing on European history. The final part of this chapter traces a parallel narrative to that of the history of bipolar disorder: that of the historical precedent for the performance of madness. The four examples of performed madness each act as antecedents for the musical examples that I foreground in chapters 3 and 4, articulating aspects of performance that can be seen in the work of Ye and Carey. Illustrating these throughlines has the same purpose in both cases, which is to establish the historical context that informs my 21st century case studies. Ye and Carey both as performers and as those living with bipolar disorder underpin the two themes of this chapter, serving as a bridge for the following chapters.

Tracing some key developments from the late 18th century to the mid-19th century serves to narrow my scope in a way that makes clear the connection between the treatment of psychiatric disorders in that particular time period and today. The late 18th to mid-19th centuries

also saw an increase in the documentation of how treatment of psychiatric disorders disproportionately negatively impacted women, people of colour, and other groups that, with our 21st century understanding, we've come to understand as marginalized. Underscoring these injustices in the already maligned perception and treatment of psychiatric disorders illustrates some particular challenges Ye and Carey have faced in communicating their respective lived experiences of bipolar disorder.

The "tortured genius"

In this chapter, it is necessary for me to frame my thinking with regard to the notion of the "tortured genius." The belief that artistic genius or exceptionalism is something that springs forth from a well of mental anguish within the artist is a common trope of Romantic ideology, but it was at the end of the 18th century that "genius" had become increasingly linked to creativity in philosophical efforts to distinguish the human race from animals.

Battersby writes, "It was creativity, not reason or talent, that made man resemble a god…made him more than an animal, and made some men superhuman and superior to others."[13] Battersby's use of "man" here is specific; the eighteenth century conceptualization of the creative genius was not one that accounted for women. Despite value being placed on stereotypically feminine characteristics such as emotion and imagination, the version of these characteristics that spawned genius defined themselves in opposition to the version thought to belong to women. Battersby elaborates by writing, "The genius's instinct, emotion, sensibility, intuition, imagination – even his madnesses – were different from those of ordinary mortals…Biological femaleness mimics the psychological femininity of the true genius."[14] This view of genius as a

[13] Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 2.
[14] Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 3.

male inherency persisted for centuries, and, as will become clear in following chapters of this thesis, informs present-day perceptions of women artists.

Genius is not only deeply entrenched in a presumption of maleness, but also one of whiteness. Philip Ewell's work unpacking "music theory's white racial frame"[15] urges us to see the ways that the "greats" of music history – and, by extension, the recipients of the label "musical genius" – are upheld as such due to the social, cultural, and capital power of white men. Ewell refers to a "citational chain" that he calls "essential to white male-framed music theoretical research."[16] The citational chain refers to how theorists cite the work of other theorists, thus codifying certain frameworks and ideas as theory itself. The more an idea is enforced and strengthened by this citational chain, the harder it is to make space for ideas outside the dominant framework. When theories of musical genius as being inherently male and white are upheld by the predominantly male and white Academy, and broader societal power structures, such a perception becomes the norm.

The "tortured" part of the "tortured genius" has time and time again, through numerous studies, been proven unequivocally false.[17] Though it has become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, with many artists believing that they are at their most open creatively when they are at their most mentally tortured, there has never been a reliable link found between artistic prowess and propensity toward mental illness. This is part of what makes this myth so dangerous. Not only does it further spread misinformation about an already mischaracterized group of people,

[15] Philip Ewell, "Beethoven Was an Above Average Composer—Let's Leave It at That," *Music Theory's White Racial Frame*, April 24, 2020, https://musictheoryswhiteracialframe.wordpress.com/2020/04/24/beethoven-was-an-above-average-composer-lets-leave-it-at-that/.
[16] Ewell, "Beethoven."
[17] Tanya Basu, "Kanye West's Bipolar Disorder and the Shaky Science of the 'Tortured Genius,'" *The Daily Beast*, June 1, 2018, https://www.thedailybeast.com/kanye-wests-bipolar-disorder-and-the-shaky-science-of-the-tortured-genius.

but the reinforcement of the “tortured genius” label has real impact on the self-perception of the so-called geniuses upon which it bestows the title. This can negatively impact individuals’ thoughts towards seeking treatment. I will elaborate on how this manifests in the lives of Ye and Carey in my following chapters.

The history of bipolar disorder

The lived reality and common understanding of bipolar disorder today, and thus across time, is in large part dependent on the societal and cultural peculiarities of a given moment. Of course, this is not exclusive to bipolar disorder. We live in a world that is often dismissive of both physical and mental disability and, more often than not, actively hostile to those living with it. In 1983, Mike Oliver coined the “social model of disability” to refer to the ways in which disability is socially constructed, as opposed to stemming from the fault of the person living with what society conceives of *as* disability.[18] I am aware of the enormity of the task that is synthesizing a temporal narrative that encapsulates the complexity of a disease like bipolar disorder. The ever-shifting attitudes toward what constitutes health and wellness, standards of care, and best practices mean that a tendency towards a monolithic perception of the mentally ill has emerged and been steadily reinforced. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that today’s “reductionist notions of disease have come to dominate our way of thinking about sickness.”[19] In light of this, I aim not to summarize the entire recorded history of bipolar disorder in merely a few pages; to do so would almost certainly contribute to a reductionist notion of the disorder. Rather, I aim to highlight the moments in history that I feel most directly and demonstrably impact the experiences of my case study artists.

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[18] Mike Oliver, *Social Work with Disabled People* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983).
[19] Charles E. Rosenberg, foreword to *Mania: A Short History of Bipolar Disorder* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), xiii.

References to mania and melancholia in medical literature far predate the 18th century. As far back as Ancient Greece, Hippocrates wrote about the Woman at Thasos.[20] This particular case study is an oft-cited historical example for psychiatrists looking to put a start date to documented cases of what they might today recontextualize as a kind of manic-depressive illness. In the time of the Ancient Greeks, medicine and treatment was linked to the balancing of the four humours. A person with a melancholic disposition ought to right their excess of black bile, and either too much blood or yellow bile was to blame for a manic temperament.

The tides shifted with advancements in the field of medicine. By the mid-17th century, English physicians Thomas Willis and Thomas Sydenham had made massive strides in understanding the then-brand new field of neurology. Willis' visualizations of the human brain and Sydenham's classifications of diseases stemming from the nervous system set the stage for perception and treatment of psychiatric illness in their lifetimes and beyond.[21]

Right alongside the birth of neurology was the ever-present undercurrent of misogynistic rhetoric perpetuated by leaders in the field. This, too, would inform hundreds of years of medical and common understanding of psychiatric illness moving forward and its impact is still resonant today. Both Willis and Sydenham believed "hysteria," the group of psychotic and histrionic symptoms they grouped together for ease of diagnosis, to be a convulsive disorder. They believed that hysteria was a disease with a neurological origin. Even so, Willis remained incredibly self-assured that hysteria was by and large a "so-called uterine disease."[22] In ascribing a physical cause to the symptoms he was seeing, Willis challenged long-standing notions that the

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[20] Geoffrey Ernest Richard Lloyd, ed. *Hippocratic Writings*, trans. John Chadwick and William Neville Mann (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978), 138.
[21] David Healy, *Mania: A Short History of Bipolar Disorder* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 23.
[22] Healy, *Mania*, 31.

source of a woman's hysteria was, in his own words, "the incantations of witches."[23] This was also an assertion that the fault for the illness lay within the body of the woman herself; and at the time the dominant medical and cultural belief was that an initial disturbance of the soul was to blame for any physiological disturbance to an individual. As such, women of the time were at a particular disadvantage when it came to mental health care at the turn of the century.

In 1785, Scottish physician William Cullen introduced the term *neuroses* and reclassified hysteria as a disorder of the nerves alongside ailments such as tetanus, epilepsy, colic, diabetes, and palpitations.[24] Cullen conceptualized these neuroses as diseases that involved "disturbances of nervous functioning without any obvious lesion of inflammation of the nerves…at postmortem."[25] At this point, hysteria was still a very general term used to describe a host of symptoms both physical and mental that were otherwise difficult to categorize. Mania and melancholia were still viewed as two separate rungs on the ladder to total insanity and as opposites rather than as two symptomatic presentations of the same disorder; one that is cyclical in nature. John Haslam, superintendent of Bethlem Hospital from 1795 to 1816 began to note common ground between mania and melancholia while observing patients in his asylum.[26] He initially made these observations in 1798, but it would be some years before the relationship between mania and melancholia would be more readily accepted by the medical community and adopted in treatment models.

When it came to actually treating maladies of the mind – that had grown to what was considered epidemic proportions by the late 18th century – physicians were ready and willing to try anything. The ever-shifting landscape of scientific fact in the realm of diagnosis meant that

[23] Healy, *Mania*, 32.
[24] Healy, *Mania*, 32.
[25] Healy, *Mania*, 32.
[26] Healy, *Mania*, 41.

pharmaceutical treatment was in constant flux as well. The field of psychiatry grew out of this time. When the dominant assumption on the part of the medical community was that mental illness was caused by a generic build up of toxins in the body, the administering of laxatives was a favoured cure.[27] The world was forever changed when morphine was isolated from opium in 1806. Opium has its own extensive and storied history when it comes to medicinal and recreational use. But when morphine was introduced to patients institutionalized in asylums, it had notable results as both a sedative and a hypnotic. Initially administered orally, by the mid-nighteenth century physicians had begun to deliver the drug intravenously using hypodermic needles; allowing the substance to reach the patient's circulatory system immediately.[28] While the goal of using morphine in the treatment of insanity and the like might have been to approximate a "cure," the advent of its use wrought further control and suppression of the mentally ill.

The changing economic landscape of England circa 1800 led to an unprecedented boom in the construction of asylums to house members of society deemed "dangerous lunatics."[29] Industrialization saw the growth of a previously untapped working class. Prior to this, it was typical of parishes to raise money for families to care for their mentally ill relatives at home.[30] This method of community care united the peasant class, but also subjected the mentally ill to abuse and a "general deprivation of access to medical advances."[31] The new labouring class, who now had to rely on precarious work as opposed to financing from the parishes and their own farm land, struggled to care for their mentally ill wards. As a result, increased rates of institutionalization seemed like a reasonable alternative. Thus, the Madhouses Act of 1828 and

[27] Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 196.
[28] Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*, 197.
[29] Healy, *Mania,* 78.
[30] Healy, *Mania*, 78.
[31] Healy, *Mania*, 78.

the Poor Law of 1834 sought to assuage public concern. The former obligated that parishes return an annual list of their lunatics and the latter recommended that they be moved into asylums en masse.[32] Other parts of Europe began to follow suit. French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol drafted a law in 1838 that mandated the cross-country building of asylums.[33]

It is important to understand that as it became convenient and – as was the prevailing belief – necessary to build more asylums to house the mentally ill, it also became increasingly profitable. Asylums were state-funded; the more money being granted by the state to build asylums, the more asylums were built, and the more people paying to house their family members in these buildings. As such, the sheer numbers of individuals deemed "dangerous lunatics" skyrocketed. This also led to further advancements in diagnosis. Healy writes:

> …when larger numbers of the insane were collected in the same place for the first time, it became inescapably clear that not all raving madmen had the same condition. This recognition prompted the first specifically psychiatric attempts to classify the various manias (Healy, 2008).

In 1838, Esquirol's observations of his patients led him to distinguish *monomania* from mania proper. He posited a kind of partial insanity marked by episodic disturbances with periods of stability in between. Esquirol faced much scrutiny and resistance in the medical community for his views; they contradicted the dominant notion of the soul. Healy articulates this backlash:

> Traditional definitions of the soul concurred that it was indivisible[.]... If a person's behavior became irrational, mad, or deranged, it followed that a bit of the soul could not be mad or deranged but that the entire person had to be deranged (Healy, 2008).

Gradually, the notion of the faculties of cognition, emotion and volition were introduced to the fields of psychology and neurophysiology.[34] Without doing away with the theory of the unity of the soul, acknowledging operational faculties allowed for some leeway in the conceptualization

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[32] Healy, *Mania*, 78.
[33] Healy, *Mania*, 78.
[34] Healy, *Mania*, 39.

of psychiatric disorders. It also accounted for the differences being observed in the many patients of asylums across Europe and North America. A physician could now recognize that one could be emotionally disturbed without having any cognitive impairment.

By 1854, two French psychiatrists would use the information they gleaned from their time treating patients in asylums to move the needle toward something more closely resembling contemporary understandings of bipolar disorder. Jules Baillarger shared his work on a mental disorder he called *folie à double forme*. It was his belief that mania and melancholia were "two stages of a single attack."[35] At a conference just weeks later, Jean-Pierre Falret shared his work on the emergence of a "new" mental illness characterized by mania and melancholia occurring in repeated and predictable patterns with periods of lucidity. He called this disorder *folie circulaire*.[36] These were fairly radical takes in the medical community, but ones that were supported by years of patient observation and subsequently difficult to dismiss.

I now find it useful to frame the experiences of those undergoing treatment in asylums around this time. I deliberately do not call these institutions hospitals even once in the course of this chapter. Asylums were stand-alone buildings often intentionally built far away from the rest of society so as to remove their inhabitants as perceived obstructions to the daily life of the non-mentally ill. Nineteenth-century asylums were not the psychiatric wards found as part of our 21st century hospitals. I am able to concede that there were surely good actors within the system of psychiatric institutionalization; those genuinely committed to caring for the members of society corralled within asylum walls. However, the abuse and negligence that was more often the norm prevents me from extending more grace than that. Patients were physically restrained, isolated from their communities, and abused by staff. While morphine was one of many

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[35] Healy, *Mania*, 55.
[36] Healy, *Mania*, 59.

experimental treatments used on patients, it also proved highly addictive and often worsened existing mental health conditions. Circumstances improved marginally in the 1860s when German psychiatrists Karl Kahlbaum and Ewald Heckler together pushed for psychiatric institution reform. They advocated for "fashionable reforms, such as greater patient freedom and the removal of restraints."[37]

These efforts, while admirable, did not overhaul the abuse happening in asylums in Europe and beyond. It also did not put a stop to abuse against mentally ill people that was occurring outside of asylums. In 1866, English physician and surgeon Isaac Baker Brown published his treatise *On the Curability of Certain Forms of Insanity, Epilepsy, Catalepsy, and Hysteria in Females*. Working off the belief that all the disorders named in his title were due to a disturbance of the nerves, Baker Brown writes of his practice of the surgical removal of the "pudic nerve."[38] Baker Brown considered his method of treatment to be "far more humane and effectual" than those of some of his peers, including Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard who opted for cauterizing the clitoris and surrounding nerves.[39] Baker Brown further refers to the pudic nerve as a "source of evil."[40] Critically, he also notes that his procedure has not cured his patients long-term. He calls this a necessary pitfall of developing any new treatment and broadly dismisses any moral objection to be made about his methods.[41] The shadow of medical malpractice committed against the "hysterical female" looms large over every century since the documented treatment of psychiatric illness began, and I will expand upon this trend in chapter 4.

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[37] Healy, *Mania*, 65.
[38] Isaac Baker Brown, preface to *On the Curability of Certain Forms of Insanity, Epilepsy, Catalepsy, and Hysteria in Females* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1866), vi.
[39] Baker Brown, *Curability*, 9.
[40] Baker Brown, *Curability*, 10.
[41] Baker Brown, *Curability*, 11-12.

What I have illustrated by highlighting certain moments in the history of bipolar disorder is the foundation that was laid to inform some of our present-day conceptions of the illness. It wouldn't be until the latter half of the 19th century and into the 20th century that manic-depressive illness – or, later, bipolar disorder – would be accepted as a basic tenet of psychiatric understanding. However, the disorder's early diagnostic history serves as a reminder of the contentious struggle for a comprehensive picture of a cyclical mental illness; one that persists even today. Similarly, early attempts at pharmaceutical treatment and psychiatric institutionalization echo today's ignorance regarding the true biological or chemical roots of bipolar disorder. For-profit health-care is a steadily lucrative business and the system's model was built in the 19th century. All these aspects of what it means to live with bipolar disorder inform public perception of the disorder. The image of the hysterical woman persists, knee-jerk reactions from the uninformed are that those living with psychosis should be locked up or sedated, and priority is given to a physician's interpretation of a patient's behaviour rather than allow an individual to tell their story in their own words.

The history of performed madness

To "perform madness" is a somewhat nebulous idea. In much the same way as the developments that shaped bipolar disorder are reflective of cultural attitudes of the time, readings of madness in art were created largely to reflect what was understood about mental illness of the time and are also ever in flux. For example, the "mad art" movement is a contemporary artistic movement that seeks to reclaim power for mentally ill artists who have been marginalized by both the Academy and the high art world, as well as the medical community.[42] It frames itself as

[42] Lisa Walter, "Mad art and the contested mind," *Mentoring Artists for Women's Art*, November 25, 2022, https://mawa.ca/newsletters/critical-writing/mad-art-and-the-contested-mind.

political resistance to biomedical essentialist notions of illness, allowing the artists space to define their “madness” on their own terms.

So as to avoid strictly relegating my understanding of the performance of madness to those depictions by decidedly un-mad people or for audiences who sought to relish in the entertainment value that was watching the insane perform their insanity, I have chosen to highlight a variety of artistic representations of performed madness. The following four examples range in their intended purpose, cultural impact, and artistic mode.

In Harpin and Foster’s *Performance, Madness and Psychiatry: Isolated Acts*, Stern writes that “the line between madness and divine experience was blurred in the eighteenth century.”[43] Science and medicine were slowly making advancements in a European society that was still largely informed by religiosity. An individual’s mental stability was difficult to discern if their apparent psychosis manifested as religious fixation or fanaticism, or claims of divine or prophetic guidance. As Stern puts it, “where some identified madness, others found a religious epiphany. Moreover, the language employed by mad-doctors to describe the experiences of those designated “mad” was sometimes resisted, not least by the people who found themselves in madhouses.”[44]

This cultural context sets the scene for a mid-18th century example of the artistic performance of madness in English poet Christopher Smart. Smart wrote his poem *Jubilate Agno* in 1758, while being treated at St. Luke’s Hospital for Lunaticks. In his own words, Smart was institutionalized because “[his] sick’ning soul was with [his] blood inflamed, And the celestial

[43] Richard Stern, “Smart’s Authority and the Eighteenth-Century Mad-Business,” in *Performance, Madness and Psychiatry: Isolated Acts*, eds. Anna Harpin and Juliet Foster (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 19.
[44] Stern, “Smart’s Authority,” 19.

image sunk, defaced and maimed."[45] In plainspeak, he had come to a sudden and all-consuming religious epiphany and had begun to demand anyone whose path he crossed pray with him in the streets. *Jubilate Agno* is as much a lengthy and passionate prayer as it is an excavation of Smart's emotional state and his experiences with institutionalization. It reads, in part:

> *LET PETER rejoice with the MOON FISH who keeps up the life in the waters by night*.
> *FOR I pray the Lord JESUS that cured the LUNATICK to be merciful to all my brethren and sisters in these houses*.
>
> Let Andrew rejoice with the Whale, who is array'd in beauteous blue and is a combination of bulk and activity.
> *For they work me with their harping-irons, which is a barbarous instrument, because I am more unguarded than others*. (Smart, 1758).

Smart's own perception of his mental health is that it affords him a greater range of emotional expression; not seeing that the extremes of his emotions might be characteristic of a mental health condition. He writes:

> Let Jude bless with the Bream, who is of melancholy from his depth and serenity.
> *For I have a greater compass of mirth and melancholy than another.* (Smart, 1758).

Despite what ailments Smart may or may not have had, *Jubilate Agno* is a rather stunningly-rendered example of the performance of madness; written while the narrative of illness dominated the artist's life. It is also a key example of a kind of reclamation of one's own narrative in the face of institutional and societal shaming and silencing. Through his art, "the poet insists on his right to define his predicament in his own terms."[46]

French composer-conductor Hector Berlioz's 1830 work *Symphonie fantastique* centres on its protagonist's fruitless obsession with a romantic interest. The protagonist, a gifted

[45] Christopher Smart, "Hymn to the Supreme Being, on recovery from a dangerous fit of illness," (London: J. Newberry, 1756), 9.
[46] Stern, "Smart's Authority," 24.

musician, lets his relentless passions drive him mad until he poisons himself with opium, succumbing to terrifying hallucinations. Berlioz represents the protagonist's worsening obsession musically through the repeated use of the theme called the *idée fixe*. Recurring throughout all five movements, the *idée fixe* haunts both the narrative and the listener. The term *idée fixe* was not Berlioz's own invention. It is a term borrowed from medical literature from the 18th century to refer to psychotic fixations. Thus, Berlioz fashioned the trials of his *jeune musicien* at the intersection of science and romance, deciding on an emotional cause for his character's mental pain rather than a chemical or biologically derived one.

Critically, *Symphonie fantastique* is widely known as a semi-autobiographical tale of Berlioz's own romantic obsession with actress Harriet Smithson (that Smithson was famous for a riveting portrayal of Ophelia, another pillar of literary madness, in a production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* won't go unnoticed here) with the composer confirming as much in numerous letters from the time he was writing the work. As Brittan extrapolates, Berlioz's correspondence is rife with mention of his "physical debilitation, psychological disturbances, and imaginative excess occasioned by his *idée fixe*. Together, [the letters] read as a series of meticulous self-diagnoses…[.]As we investigate Berlioz's own pathology, the analogous condition afflicting his symphonic alter-ego comes into sharper focus."[47]

Berlioz was creatively spurred on by his mounting mental distress; while he believed that his obsession "motivated him toward "immense" musical thought and concentrated his compositional power," it also "proved increasingly destructive to his emotional and psychological health."[48] In connecting his mental health to his capacity for artistic greatness,

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[47] Francesca Brittan, "Berlioz and the Pathological Fantastic: Melancholy, Monomania, and Romantic Autobiography," *19th century music* 29, no. 3, (2006): 215, https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2006.29.3.211.
[48] Brittan, "Berlioz," 217.

Berlioz added to what was already a line of, at the time, contemporary fiction that imagined those (men) who were consumed by their passions, their *idée fixe*, as Romantic heroes and imaginative visionaries. This association further linked the pathology of monomania to the mental fortitude of "the creative and eccentric genius…to the intense intellectual absorption demonstrated by writers and philosophers."[49]

In 1835, Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti premiered his opera, *Lucia di Lamermoor* to great acclaim. A tragedy about the plight of Lucia, a woman trapped in an arranged marriage to a man whom she does not love, it remains one of Donizetti's most critically well-regarded works. The opera's climax is the Mad Scene, which takes place after Lucia feels she has signed her life away via marriage to the wrong man and murders him. In her bereavement, she falls into despair and insanity.

Lucia's "madwoman" status is represented both musically in both the instrumentation that supports the libretto, as well as through the vocal stylings of the performer in the role. Lucia's vocal performance is characterized by the rapidity with which it shifts between volume and speed, seemingly meant to evoke a declining and chaotic state of mind. The *bel canto* vocal technique employed in the scene delineates a level of musical excess. This is characteristic of a number of "mad scenes" and specifically "madwomen" throughout opera history, including Monteverdi's nymph and Strauss' Salome.[50]

McClary pinpoints an important gendered aspect of the musical excess that accompanies these musical depictions of madness. She writes, "the excessive ornamentation and chromaticism that mark the madwoman's deviance have long been privileged components in Western

[49] Brittan, "Berlioz," 228.
[50] Susan McClary, "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen," in *Feminine Endings*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 81.

music…[.]When these same strategies appear in instrumental music, they are regarded as indications not of psychopathology but of genius."[51] McClary elaborates by writing that composers of the time faced the challenge that was the belief that madwomen of everyday society had the power to corrupt the sane should they be given the chance to speak. Thus, the musical representation of women's madness had to ensure that:

> …the listener experiences and *yet does not identify* with the discourse of madness. It becomes crucial, therefore, that the musical voice of reason be ever audibly present as a reminder, so that the ravings of the madwoman will remain securely marked as radically "Other," so that the contagion will not spread (McClary, 2002).

In the Mad Scene, Lucia is flanked by gawking and deeply concerned wedding guests who act as the voice of reason, and are meant to demonstrate how far from sanity she has fallen.

That women were offered limited opportunities for the musical expression of particular emotionality, and that it was almost exclusively curated by men, is not accidental. Operatic, and otherwise "excessive" vocal stylings might have allowed women performers a level of freedom while performing, but it also relegated emotional expression – and, by extension, expressions of the symptoms of mental illness – to the performative space wherein it could be consumed for entertainment.

Just as Donzietti's audiences felt safe from Lucia's madness by virtue of their distance from it, asylums (as noted earlier in this chapter) were very much isolated from the cities and broader societies in which they stood. As a result, they eventually had to start functioning as self-sustaining communities. Around the early 19th century, when very early attempts at institution reform started, asylums began to include ballrooms and rec halls to provide

[51] McClary, "Excess and Frame," 82.

entertainment options for their patients as well as facilities for the staff who lived on site. With this came the advent of theatrical and musical performances by and for patients.[52]

In 1843, the Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries and Galloway produced and staged the farcical play *Raising the Wind*. The play was directed, performed, and produced by patients, thereby giving them an opportunity to participate in artistic expression despite their relegation to the fringes of society. Dr. William A.F. Browne, the superintendent of Crichton Royal Hospital recorded patients' responses to the play and emphasized the utility of the dramatic arts as a therapeutic method. He wrote that for individuals to see such performances:

> …by members of their own community, by those participating in their own infirmities, is assuredly a noble conquest over the sorrows and intractableness of disease – a miracle if we reflect upon the past, an augury of success if we look to the future (Browne, 1843).

Browne, through writing from the perspective of a clinician, hits on a central tenet of this thesis which is the benefit of connecting to others through the artistic representation of a shared experience of mental illness. Such a claim is also the backbone of any number of artistic movements or major works in the many years since Browne's writing. Browne's assessment of this sort of performative representation as an important part of mental health treatment of the future is prescient.

Conclusion

In establishing the myth of the "tortured genius," I demonstrate how it is deeply committed to sustaining dominant hegemonies of maleness and whiteness, and how it can further misconstrue the truth of the lived experience of mental illness.

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[52] Juliet Foster, "Performance in Bethlem, Fulbourn and Brookwood Hospitals: A Social Psychological and Social Historical Examination," in *Performance, Madness and Psychiatry: Isolated Acts, eds. Anna Harpin and Juliet Foster* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 43.

The late 18th to mid-19th century was a time of great change when it came to both the development of bipolar disorder. Much of what the general public knows about bipolar disorder today can be traced to the moments that I detail in this chapter. Especially when considering how today's medical professionals and the public at large approach psychiatric institutionalization and pharmaceutical treatment, the roots of the contemporary misunderstanding that persist were planted hundreds of years ago. Further, as will become clear in the following chapters, the steadfast resistance to women's autonomy in general extended to their treatment in medical settings and continues to permeate the stigma surrounding women with bipolar disorder in contemporary discourse.

The examples of performed madness that I detailed in this chapter demonstrate the breadth of how madness was being performed during the time period in question. They also serve as a framework to guide the analysis to come in my following two chapters, analysis that foregrounds aspects such as the shared experience of emotionality, women's autonomy in depicting mental health challenges, and self-authorship, and musical genius. In my next chapter, I analyze how Ye and Carey use the techniques of vocality to express their emotional states in relation to their experiences with bipolar disorder. In considering genre, the delivery of lyrics, and audibility, themes of vulnerability and authenticity emerge alongside other themes common to those living with the disorder.

Chapter 3: The Communication of Mental Health Experiences Through Vocality

Introduction

In this chapter, I take an in-depth look at the music of Ye and Mariah Carey in order to unpack how their experiences with bipolar disorder manifest within their work. The necessity of closely analyzing the music of Ye and Carey on dimensions of vocality is by virtue of the inherent perceived authenticity of the musical voice. By nature, popular music and its stars must convey a level of authenticity in their delivery in order to connect to an audience in any notable capacity. Yet, as Auslander writes, "the real person is the dimension of performance to which the audience has the least access, since the audience generally infers what performers are like as real people from their performance personae…[.]"[53] To compensate, the star persona – from the Romantics to the broad theatricality of contemporary rock culture – has defined itself by its communication of these musical personae. This notion of authenticity in relation to contemporary popular music as mediated by technological advancements in music is expanded upon by Jennifer Fleeger in *Mismatched Women: The Siren's Song Through the Machine.* Fleeger writes that "the proliferation of voice-altering technology now threatens the believability of live performance."[54] Therefore, while authenticity in popular music might have once referred to the observable and "real" quality of a performer's voice, it is now a complex discourse pertaining to "authorship, presence, sincerity, originality, expressivity…[.]"[55] So, for Ye and Carey, what I perceive to be the emotional truth as conveyed by their voices is so because of the

[53] Philip Auslander, "Introduction," in *Performing Glam Rock: Gender & Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 5.
[54] Jennifer Fleeger, "Susan Boyle: The Amateur in the Age of Auto-Tune," in *Mismatched Women: The Siren's Song Through the Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 168.
[55] Fleeger, "Susan Boyle," 168.

ever-fluctuating negotiations of authenticity prescribed to the voices of the stars of popular music in a musical landscape that is constantly finding new ways to negotiate that authenticity.

Ye and Carey might have similarities when it comes to their work ethic and creative control over their respective output, but an analysis of their music reveals their varied experiences with bipolar disorder. These experiences are communicated through unique musical choices pertaining to genre, the emotional delivery of lyrics, and the audibility of their voices in relation to their production choices.

Each artist has an extensive oeuvre – Ye has ten solo studio albums to his name at the time of writing and Carey has fifteen. In the interest of narrowing the scope of my project, as well as crafting the most compelling of cases for my research, I have analyzed the content of two albums from each artist and those are the musical focus of this chapter and the one to follow. The albums I chose function as simultaneous mirrors and narrative foils to each other within the artists' discographies.

For Ye, I have chosen *MBDTF* (2010) and *ye* (2018). Both albums were recorded and released after periods of personal and professional tribulation for Ye, with the artist retreating into a self-imposed exile to write them. Their origins are similar and they both focus thematically on mental health, fame and its pitfalls, and interpersonal strife. However, the execution of each album is very different and offers fascinating opportunities to view Ye's mental state after having been diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2016.

For Carey, I look to *EoM* (2005) and *Caution* (2018). Similarly to Ye, *EoM* was released prior to Carey receiving any treatment for her bipolar disorder while *Caution* was released after she had accepted her diagnosis and had been following a regimented treatment plan. This gives me the opportunity to analyze the ways in which Carey's understanding of her mental health has

shifted after a significant amount of time and through major life changes. Both albums have been critically praised for their perceived "authenticity" and this is an endlessly fascinating notion to me, especially in the context of identity formation after a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, which I will expand upon in my analysis of self-perception in the oeuvre of Ye in Carey in chapter 4.

This chapter, as well as the subsequent one, are structured such that my entire analysis of one artist is followed by the entire analysis of the other as related to each topic about which I'm writing. For example, the subheading in this chapter that pertains to the delivery of lyrics starts with the totality of my analysis of both Ye albums before beginning with my analysis of both Carey albums. This is as opposed to a structure that would go back and forth between the two repeatedly. I decided on this structure for clarity's sake as well as for the ways in which I do believe that the albums I have chosen for each artist act as companions to each other.

Genre

Ye and Carey explore their feelings regarding mental health and wellness through the generic vocality afforded to them by the chosen sonic landscape of their work. Broadly, they both work within pop music. There is some overlap within their musical spheres; they are both indebted to the gospel and soul music on which they were raised and find ways to incorporate those influences into their songwriting and production, for example. While both Ye and Carey are also inclined to experiment with genre, the former predominantly operates within a hip-hop domain and the latter within the R&B and pop fields. These choices are not incidental. Each artist finds a benefit to writing and performing in one particular genre over another. This could be a creative and aesthetic benefit or – as I argue – for the fulfillment of the specific emotional demands of the music they are writing.

Rap music, and hip-hop culture more broadly, is marked by its origins as a form of expression for disenfranchised and marginalized Black youth. It developed out of its connections to other Black genres of music such as blues and R&B. Today, it is one of the most commercially dominant forms of popular music globally. It did not always see this level of critical and commercial success. At the time of its inception, Black men in particular – as compared to their white counterparts – were at high risk for violence and discrimination in the USA of the 1970s due to government inaction and rampant racism. Chang writes, "during the mid-1970's, most of the youthful energy that became known as hip-hop could be contained in a tiny seven-mile circle [in the Bronx.]"[56] As the genre developed, so too did the vocal stylings of rappers performing on hip-hop records. Far from simply "talking" over a beat, Toop writes:

> Rap has matured into a form of speech delivery that can be described as lyrical speech. The pitching does not conform to melodic demands but rather rolls off the tongue with an actor's sense of drama, a comedian's grasp of timing and a saxophonist's appreciation of the precision and fluidity that can be expressed within musical time. (Toop, 2000.)

Rap provides a platform for those who might not consider themselves virtuosic singers to express the complex emotional landscape they traverse with just as much precision, bolstered by the rich history of the genre's musical origins. So, when Ye performs as a rapper, and raps about his mental health, he is part of a legacy of artists who have found connection in the genre as a place where the disenchantment of Black men is treated seriously and with care.

Carey is not an opera singer. However, she was trained in the style of one by her mother Patricia Carey, a vocal coach and professional opera singer in her own right. From the age of four, Carey began receiving lessons from her mother who taught her proper

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[56] Jeff Chang, "Furious Styles: The Evolution of Style in the Seven-Mile World," in *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 109.

operatic technique alongside popular music styles. She also imbued her daughter with the technical skill to embody the Romantic-style execution of emotion. This, combined with her penchant for R&B ballads (another genre known for the way it pushes its artists to reach into endless wellsprings of emotion) has made her a stand-out in the landscape of popular music. In listening to Carey's music today, and considering her commercial success, it bears resemblance to the notion that "in opera of the high Romantic period, from about 1825 to 1850, the most important and, as a rule, highest paid figure was the soprano who could deliver poignant drama as well as coloratura."[57] Carey's ability to combine dramatic and emotionally poignant execution with a high degree of technical proficiency has long been her trademark.

Carey's operatic vocal stylings also have a connection to the previously expounded upon operatic "mad woman." As I explained in my second chapter, vocal excess in opera was not only used to communicate heightened emotionality but also specifically the female madness that characterized numerous operatic "madwomen" of the 19th century. Carey has long been open about her idolization of famed operatic soprano, Leontyne Price, who she admired as a diva in the true sense of the word. In a letter written by Price to Carey, Price wrote, "...Your creativity and performances are superb. You present your compositions with a depth of feeling that is rarely, if ever, seen or heard…[.]This brings you a standing ovation and a resounding *Brava*! *Brava*! *Brava*!"[58] It is a moment of pride that brought Carey to tears when she discussed it in an interview with Oprah Winfrey.

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[57] John Roselli, "Grand Opera: Nineteenth-Century Revolution and Twentieth-Century Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100.
[58] *The Oprah Conversation.* Season 1, episode 5, "Mariah Carey," aired September 24, 2020, on Apple Tv+.

Delivery of Lyrics

The recording of Ye's fifth studio album, *MBDTF*, has become the stuff of legend. In 2009, despite his incredible early career success with the "higher education" trilogy – that is, *The College Dropout* (2004), *Late Registration* (2005), and *Graduation* (2007) – and the new commercial heights to which he was taken with 2008's *808s & Heartbreak*, Ye had already developed a reputation for having an inflated ego and a level of arrogance that eventually proved too much for the general public. In 2009, he faced massive backlash for interrupting Taylor Swift while she was accepting an award at MTV's Video Music Awards. He stormed the stage and grabbed the mic from her during her acceptance speech to assert that Beyoncé, a fellow nominee in Swift's category, should have won the award instead. The public quickly turned on Ye. In this loss of public favour, he fled to a recording studio in Hawaii for a month to make what has come to be known as his masterpiece. Ye saw the album as the key to the redemption of his public image, and thus insisted upon its perfection.[59] He would routinely forgo sleep in order to work on the album. He claims that "POWER," the album's lead single, "took 5,000 hours, like literally 5,000 man-hours…"[60] from conception to recording. This perfectionist work ethic paid off; *MBDTF* was lauded by fans and critics alike, securing Ye's redemption arc.

The lyrical motif of juxtaposition and contradiction, of the haziness through which it is often difficult to ascertain authenticity, is one that reappears throughout *MBDTF*. The album's lyrics often deal in double entendre – a tool exceedingly common in hip-hop and rap. From Lil

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[59] Kirk Walker Graves, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 39.
[60] Power 105.1, 2010, radio.

Wayne's classic "real Gs move in silence like lasagna"[61] in "6 Foot 7 Foot (feat. Cory Gunz)" to Pusha T's "I build mine off fed time and dope lines"[62] in "Suicide (feat. Ab-Liva)," the use of double entendre in rap is a time-honoured practice that dates back to the origins of battle rap – which in and of itself sees its origins in the dozens.[63]

In *MBDTF*'s opening track, "Dark Fantasy," a resonant piano chord introduces Bon Iver's Justin Vernon as he sings, "Can we get much higher?"[64] The question of whether this is meant to refer to Ye's stratospheric levels of fame at the time of *MBDTF*'s recording, the themes of substance use and addiction that recur across the album, or the mania associated with bipolar disorder – which those present for the recording of the album attest to Ye experiencing, and Ye himself has expressed was a motivator – is largely redundant because it is referring to all three.

But more than just using double entendre, the lyrics of *MBDTF* blur the line when it comes to subjectivity, allowing for multidimensional readings that shed light on Ye's emotional state. Throughout the album, Ye employs the album's arsenal of featured artists, and those voices featured via sampling, to create a dialogue between different facets of Ye's own psyche. This is apparent on track two of *MBDTF*, "Gorgeous."

Rapper and singer Kid Cudi performs the hook of the song; a bluesy, guitar-driven lament that reads like someone convincing themself that this is their only shot at something critical.

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[61] Lil Wayne means that real gangsters ("Gs") conduct their business discreetly and likens their actions to the silent letter "G" in the word "lasagna," but also that "real Gs" conduct their business like the "law's on ya" – playing with the pronunciation of the word "lasagna" and intimating the watchful eye of the police.

[62] Pusha T means that he has built his success off his "dope lines" meaning the lines of cocaine he has sold, his lyrics which he considers "dope" as in the colloquial word meaning very good, and his lyrics which are *about* his time dealing cocaine.

[63] See Shingi Mavima, "Bigger By the Dozens: The Prevalence of Afro-Based Tradition in Battle Rap," *The journal of hip hop studies* (2016) for a history of battle rap tradition and the importance of the dozens to hip-hop culture.

[64] "Dark Fantasy," track #1 on Kanye West, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Def Jam Recordings and Roc-A-Fella Records, 2010, Apple Music audio, 0:23-0:27.

Cudi sings, “Ain't no question if I want it, I need it / I can feel it slowly drifting away from me / I'm on the edge, so why you playing? I'm saying / I will never ever let you live this down”[65] over a distorted electric guitar that parallels his vocal melody. The lyrical reference to an acknowledgement of a semblance of security “drifting away” betrays Ye’s frustration at his own inability to control his emotional state. By using Cudi’s voice as a proxy, he allows himself to articulate that he is out of control and wouldn’t be able to forgive himself should he not regain that control. Sense of agency, an individual’s capacity for decision-making and self-assertion in their life, is critical regardless of any extra barriers they may face to achieving it. But for symptoms of mental illness that complicate a person’s average sense of agency, such as those individuals experiencing psychosis who have trouble discerning their actions from reality and those experiencing the helplessness that often accompanies depression,[66] this sense of agency is paramount.

Sampling is one of the hallmarks of hip-hop. It is a practice as old as the genre itself and can serve to reinvigorate a long-forgotten piece of music or deepen the artistic message of a song through recontextualization. Ye is known for his crate digging approach to sampling, the process of sifting through the crates of vinyl records in second-hand stores in order to find obscure sounds to sample. One striking example of Ye’s sampling work that also continues *MBDTF*’s motif of utilizing the voices of others to stand in for a fragmented psyche occurs on track three, “POWER.”

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[65] “Gorgeous (feat. Kid Cudi & Raekwon),” track #2 on Kanye West, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Def Jam Recordings and Roc-A-Fella Records, 2010, Apple Music audio, 0:22-0:42.
[66] Patrick Haggard and Valerian Chambon, “Sense of agency,” *Current Biology* 22, no. 10 (May 2012): 390-392, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2012.02.040.

In the song's opening moments, Ye raps "I'm living in that 21st century, doing something mean to it"[67] before launching into a sermon about the ways in which his power over the masses is corrupting him. The chorus – "No one man should have all that power / The clock's ticking, I just count the hours / Stop tripping, I'm tripping off the power" – concludes with a sample of prog-rock band King Crimson's 1969 song "21st Century Schizoid Man."[68] The King Crimson song is about a forewarned future that might come to pass as a result of the world's indifference to atrocities and large-scale tragedy. King Crimson's "21st century schizoid man" is one who develops schizoid symptoms as a result of his desensitization.[69]

In "POWER," Ye likens himself to the prophesied 21st century schizoid man. In this way, he likely acknowledges the ways that power has warped his state of mind. The symptoms of schizoid personality disorder are less specifically relevant, but the symptom of schizoid personality disorder that Ye appears to be singling out most is that which makes those diagnosed with the disorder "seem indifferent to the approval or criticism of others."[70] The narrative of "POWER" is chiefly concerned with this push and pull – the ways in which Ye acknowledges his public perception and how it interacts with his self-perception, but simultaneously boasts that it doesn't (or can't) dismantle the pedestal on which he has found himself.

The facade unravels in the song's outro when Ye's confident claim that he has "the power, make your life so exciting"[71] echoes and gradually fades away until all that remains is a chorus and a cacophony of synths. When Ye's voice returns, his tone is different. He harshly, but

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[67] "POWER," track #3 on Kanye West, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Def Jam Recordings and Roc-A-Fella Records, 2010, Apple Music audio, 0:11-0:15.
[68] West, "POWER," 0:25-0:37.
[69] "21st Century Schizoid Man," track #1 on King Crimson, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, Island Records, 1969, Apple Music audio.
[70] American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-V.* Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013, 653.
[71] West, "POWER," 3:15-3:25.

without the bravado of his previous lines, raps, "Now this will be a beautiful death" as singer Dwele croons in a falsetto "I'm jumping out the window, I'm letting everything go." This back-and-forth between the two continues.[72] Ye appears to express suicidal ideation in the lyrics of this outro, and links the feelings to his conception of power to his idea of what is means to be "schizoid." Ye's delivery of "this will be a beautiful death" and subsequently "you got the power to let power go?" becomes more strangled as a maniacal laugh appears to taunt him from behind the stuttering King Crimson sample. The laugh pans in stereo as Ye's voice drops out and the song ends on the finality of the line "21st century schizoid man."[73] The implication here is that Ye's release from the all-consuming weight of absolute power is death. The "power to let power go" to which he is referring appears to be the ability to control one's own fate through the ending of one's own life. Power thus manifests as a laughing demon of sorts, pushing Ye to the metaphorical windowsill and off the edge.

If *MBDTF* is a maximalist dreamscape, 2018's *ye* is a deconstruction of the mythos of Ye's persona. Like *MBDTF*, *ye* came on the heels of another loss of public favour for its progenitor. This time, it was after a series of bizarre public appearances that culminated in a hospitalization and psychiatric hold for the artist. This is where Ye was ultimately diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and his quasi-self-titled album (he hadn't legally changed his name by this point) was his first album release post-diagnosis. *ye* is barebones in its production and even its tracklist – clocking in at only twenty-four minutes in length as compared to *MBDTF*'s one hour and fifteen minutes. Where aspects of *MBDTF* are shrouded in their narrative conceit, wrapped in metaphor, and the common ornaments of hip-hop's lyrical complexity, *ye* is significantly more

[72] West, "POWER," 3:43-4:20.
[73] West, "POWER," 4:31-4:52.

straightforward in what it aims to say. Even the visual aesthetic of *ye* is notably less constructed than that of its counterpart. *MBDTF* had a series of five paintings designed by American artist George Condo all used as various alternate album covers that functioned as representations of the album's major themes; the main cover features a version of Ye with a wide grin, gripping a beer and being straddled by a nude phoenix or harpy-esque creature. Conversely, the album artwork for *ye* is a simple photo of the landscape of Jackson Hole, Wyoming – where the album was recorded – and Ye's handwriting in neon green that reads "I hate being bi-polar its [sic] awesome." The songs on the album reflect this lean towards candor, as well as uphold the simultaneous trend of juxtaposition and contradiction found throughout Ye's discography – including on *MBDTF*.

The very first lyrics on *ye* are "The most beautiful thoughts are always beside the darkest / Today I seriously thought about killing you / I contemplated, premeditated murder."[74] These lyrics are offered not as a rap or sung performance, but as a calmly delivered spoken word piece in the song, "I Thought About Killing You." The first part of the song is delivered in this way, expressing Ye's most intrusive thoughts. Later in the song, Ye goes on to say the following:

> See, if I was tryin' 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
>
> I love myself way more than I love you
>
> And I think about killing myself

[74] "I Thought About Killing You," track #1 on Kanye West, *ye*, GOOD Music and Def Jam Recordings, 2018, Apple Music audio, 0:17-0:30.

> So, best believe, I thought about killing you today. (West, "I Thought About Killing You," 2:00-2:19).

The first half of the song, up to and including the above lines, read as stream of consciousness with Ye speaking to some unknown subject. Whether or not the lines are directed at anyone in particular, such as a spouse or even something more nebulous such as his career or public persona is unclear, but the almost epistolary nature of their delivery brings to mind that perhaps Ye is only talking to himself. Certain lines repeat at random intervals, Ye hums through distortion in the background, and the lines ebb and flow at will. The piece is essentially the artistic representation of the psychiatric symptom that is intrusive thoughts.[75] Ye further points out the album's thesis statement, the free expression of such thoughts, through the line "Just say it out loud to see how it feels."[76] In an interview with David Letterman, Ye explains his approach to the album, and "I Thought About Killing You," by saying that he believes freedom of thought and expression to be an inherently brave act.[77]

There is a sort of bridge between the two parts of "I Thought About Killing You." That is, if the first part is the stream of consciousness spoken word prose representing intrusive thoughts and depression, the final part is a representation of mania. The bridge then represents the rise from one polarity to the other, as well as plainly articulates the emotional aspects of Ye's symptomatic presentation. As Ye recites a list of those to whom he's reached out for help, to whom he's expressed these thoughts of depression and suicidality, he continues by saying – somewhere rhythmically between his spoken word delivery and a sung passage – that it "[gets]

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[75] See Kelly Bilodeau, "Managing intrusive thoughts," *Harvard Health Publishing* (2021) for a definition of intrusive thoughts as well as more information on their source and treatment.
[76] West, "I Thought About Killing You," 1:00-1:01.
[77] *My Next Guest Needs No Introduction with David Letterman*, season 2, episode 1, "Kanye West," directed by Michael Steed, aired May 31, 2019, on Netflix.

so bright, it’s no sun, get so loud I hear none / Screamed so loud, got no lungs, hurt so bad I go numb.”[78] A series of contradictions mirroring the often fraught time those with bipolar disorder often have in attempting to decipher their moods, Ye also references the decrease of physical sensation that often accompanies a shift into a manic or hypomanic state.

The song’s abrupt musical and lyrical shift in its final part is where its narrative arc crystallizes. Over a trap beat and sparse synths, Ye begins rapping in earnest. The lyrical vulnerability of the song’s first half is gone, replaced by braggadocio. Ye asserts that while his peers might say that they are heroes, “[he] don’t see no cape.”[79] It’s not the first time that Ye has likened himself to a superhero, and he does it elsewhere on *ye*. It might be easy to dismiss this particular form of self-importance from Ye as the narcissism of his star persona reappearing once again. While this is surely at least partly the case, a more nuanced analysis would suggest that these particular lyrical nods of grandiosity are characteristic of the inflated sense of self esteem and increase in energy associated with a mania or hypomania. This high sense of self worth is hammered home in the lyric “If I wasn’t shining so hard, wouldn’t be no shade.”[80] The line also acts as a parallel as well as contrast to the line from earlier in the song; “get so bright, it’s no sun.” Where earlier, Ye positioned his heightened state of being as a negative thing – saying that it prohibits him from experiencing the positive aspects of his day to day (or, “the sun”) – he is now saying that this heightened state enables him to experience a broader spectrum of emotion, including those negative emotions from which the average person might more commonly shy

[78] West, “I Thought About Killing You,” 2:20-2:37.
[79] West, “I Thought About Killing You,” 3:24-3:26.
[80] West, “I Thought About Killing You,” 3:31-3:35.

away (or, "shade.")[81] In the manic state represented by the song, Ye is more likely to see the symptoms of his disorder as beneficial to his functioning.

"Ghost Town (feat. PARTYNEXTDOOR)" is structured not dissimilarly to a song like "Gorgeous." In order to understand the song, we once again have to turn to the artists Ye features and view them as proxies for aspects of his own psyche, an idea I will pursue further in my next chapter.

After an opening verse from R&B singer PARTYNEXTDOOR, "Gorgeous" collaborator Kid Cudi returns to deliver a hook interpolated from 1965 soul song "Take Me for a Little While," originally recorded by Jackie Ross. Cudi sings, "I've been trying to make you love me / But everything I try just takes you further from me" in a wailing, anguished tone.[82]

As I previously illuminated in my analysis of "Gorgeous," Ye seemingly finds Kid Cudi's voice to be of particular use to him in terms of communicating some especially vulnerable, or otherwise shrouded, part of his psyche. Kid Cudi's verse in "Ghost Town" can be seen as an address from Ye to his loved ones, or even his fans or the general public. It is effective in this way as a plea for understanding and an admittance that much of Ye's public posturing is in an effort for adoration. Yet, in the context of the song's narrative framing of a ghost town – an abandoned locale in which, perhaps, Ye is the lone drifter – Cudi's verse takes on meaning as a plea from Ye to himself. Such analysis would posit that the "you" that Cudi (read: Ye) is trying to make love him *is* himself, and that all the efforts he takes to get there make him more of a stranger to himself. This reading would align with those feelings of fractured identity so common in those living with bipolar disorder.

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[81] This lyric also functions as a double entendre, playing on the slang phrase "throwing shade" meaning to disrespect someone, often subtly, and with contempt. Ye means that were it not for his level of success, he would not have the number of detractors that he does.
[82] "Ghost Town (feat. PARTYNEXTDOOR)," track #6 on Kanye West, *ye,* GOOD Music and Def Jam Recordings, 2018, Apple Music audio, 0:59-1:21.

Directly after this, Ye sings his verse. In it, he is likely addressing himself as "you" – willing himself not to bet his life "on a pack of Fentanyl" and reassuring himself that "someday the drama'll be gone / and they'll play this song on and on."[83] In these lyrics, Ye appears to reference his addiction to prescription medication, something he has said intensified during his 2016 psychiatric hold. The two-minute outro of the song comes from singer 070 Shake, whose joyous, gospel-tinged delivery of the lyrics is supported by the soundscape of a raucous snare and a church organ. Her verse reads as follows:

> Woah, once again I am a child
> I let it all go (let go), of everything that I know
> Of everything that I know
> And nothing hurts anymore, I feel kinda free
> We're still the kids we used to be
> I put my hand on a stove, to see if I still bleed
> And nothing hurts anymore, I feel kinda free. (West, "Ghost Town (feat. PARTYNEXTDOOR)," 2:34-3:19.)

070 Shake's verse, to me, functions as a stand-in for Ye's inner child. With more thematic parallels to *MBDTF* ("My childlike creativity, purity, and honesty / Is honestly being crowded by these grown thoughts / Reality is catching up with me / Taking my inner child, I'm fighting for custody / With these responsibilities that they entrusted me"),[84] Ye uses the voice of 070 Shake to claim the freedom that connection to his child-like joy brings him. 070 Shake's voice so notably

[83] West, "Ghost Town (feat. PARTYNEXTDOOR)," 1:28-1:46.
[84] "POWER," track #3 on Kanye West, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Def Jam Recordings and Roc-A-Fella Records, 2010, Apple Music audio, 1:58-2:13.

contrasts that of Kid Cudi that it solidifies this point. Her vocal tone is uniquely androgynous; not necessarily sounding like that of an adult woman, but rather existing in a space where it can conceivably pass for that of a young boy.

The triptych that is the Kid Cudi, Ye, and 070 Shake verses positions Ye in the centre of the titular "ghost town" and provides further insight into Ye's emotional state through the use of the voices of his collaborators. 070 Shake and Kid Cudi's voices allow Ye to commune with parts of himself unseen, and the framework of "Ghost Town (feat. PARTYNEXTDOOR)" brings this internal dialogue to light for listeners. In doing so, Ye engages with themes of identity and struggles with self-esteem while exploring the idea that he is alone in his feelings – in a ghost town. But by calling on the voices of his collaborators, as well as by expressing his feelings in a public forum, he intimates that he is not alone. Thus, Ye engages with one of the most effective interventions in the treatment of recurrent episodes of bipolar disorder – social support.[85]

EoM is considered Carey's "comeback album." Her comeback from *what*, exactly, is complicated. Following the critical and commercial flop that was Carey's film and accompanying soundtrack album *Glitter* (2001), Carey's public image took a significant hit. The tabloid media who had been looking for a justifiable reason to deride her had found one. Carey had long faced accusations that she couldn't *really* sing, didn't deserve what appeared to the general public as overnight success, and had routinely been called a diva in the negative sense. Yet, she had never well and truly had a career setback to which detractors could point as her deserved karma. *Glitter* was Carey's first public failure. Following a hospitalization for exhaustion, during which she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and a follow-up album that

[85] Rebecca Owen, et al. "The Reciprocal Relationship between Bipolar Disorder and Social Interaction: A Qualitative Investigation: Bipolar Disorder and Social Interaction," *Clinical psychology and psychotherapy* 24 (2016): 911–918.

critics deemed lackluster (2002's *Charmbracelet*), Carey was dogged by public sentiment that perhaps her career had come to an end. Fears were laid to rest with *EoM*. *EoM* signaled a return to form for Carey and the use of her nickname in the album's title denoted a level of truth and vulnerability; "some distance between Mariah the person and Mariah the celebrity."[86]

Track nine on *EoM* is "Circles," a heart wrenching breakup ballad on an album that begins with the exclamation that there are "no tears" and "no time to cry, making the most of life."[87] Despite this initial claim, "Circles" begins with the confession that Carey has been "trying to hide the pain / Painting on a smile with lipstick, putting on a big charade."[88] This is not me suggesting that Carey's titular emancipation is one built on a falsehood, or one based in concealment. Rather, I offer that to admit to having lived a life of having to hide the pain you feel, and then reveal that pain, *is* the emancipation to which Carey is referring.

Carey sings the opening lyrics of "Circles" without hesitation, in her chest voice. Despite her obvious vocal skill – she oscillates from a G3 in the song's bridge to her whistle register in the song's outro – Carey is unafraid to let her voice sound imperfect, which in and of itself takes an impressive amount of vocal skill. Her voice cracks throughout the song, on words including "pain" and "tears,"[89] a signal to the listener of increased emotion.

The song's pre-chorus of "I just keep going 'round and 'round / and 'round in circles, keep on tumbling down"[90] evokes, of course, the song's central narrative of the ways Carey continues to change herself and her behaviour to appease an ex-partner. Yet, in light of Carey's

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[86] Jennifer Vineyard, "Bands A–Z: Mariah Carey," *MTV News*, February 6, 2006, http://www.mtv.com/bands/c/carey_mariah/news_feature_032805/index.jhtml.
[87] "It's Like That (feat. Jermaine Dupri & Fatman Scoop)," track #1 on Mariah Carey, *The Emancipation of Mimi*, The Island Def Jam Music Group, 2005, Apple Music audio, 0:52-1:01.
[88] "Circles," track #9 on Mariah Carey, *The Emancipation of Mimi*, The Island Def Jam Music Group, 2005, Apple Music audio, 0:06-0:15.
[89] Carey, "Circles," 0:07 & 1:29.
[90] Carey, "Circles," 0:26-0:38.

experiences with bipolar disorder – which were not public at the time of *EoM*'s release – Carey also seems to be acknowledging her proclivity toward self-destructive or broadly unhealthy cyclical patterns. The final lines of the chorus are "nothing's the same / you got me running around in circles over you."[91] Carey is not the only songwriter to harp on the ways in which a breakup can make an artist reflect on the nature of the self. However, To *not* link this theme to the common experience of bipolar disorder, when such a theme is so central to the shared experience of many, would be reductive of me.

The song's lyrics are reinforced by instances of repetition courtesy of a chorus of backup singers. The first time Carey sings "I just keep going 'round and 'round," the choir behind her sings "and around / and around / and around / and around."[92] Later, as Carey sings "I don't think I can make it without you" in the chorus, the background singers repeat "you / you / you / you / you / you."[93] The chorus does not remain on one pitch, but rather sings a gradual descending melodic line before quickly ascending again. They further echo and swirl around her every line in the bridge, both repeating her entire lyrics as well as single words from elsewhere in the song. The dizzying and all-encompassing impact is such that it feels as though the repetitious circles about which Carey sings are actively taking hold of her over the course of the song; she is stuck but also in transit.

The closing track on *EoM* is "Fly Like a Bird." The song is a straight-forward gospel song, both lyrically and musically. It begins with a recording of Carey's own pastor, Clarence Keaton, who recites part of Psalm 30:5 when he says, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning / Trust Him."[94] "Fly Like a Bird" sees Carey detail her vision of heaven.

[91] Carey, "Circles," 0:53-1:05.
[92] Carey, "Circles," 0:30-0:35.
[93] Carey, "Circles," 0:50-0:54.
[94] "Fly Like a Bird," track #14 on Mariah Carey, *The Emancipation of Mimi*, The Island Def Jam Music Group, 2005, Apple Music audio, 0:08-0:24.

For Carey, it is a place of freedom from emotional pain and suffering. Carey emphasizes that in her darkest moments she feels God's "unconditional love"[95] and feels secure in her faith that she will one day reach a place ("home") where her burdens will be "erased" and she will be "...free to / fly like a bird / take to the sky."[96] Then, in the second verse into the chorus, Carey expresses that her negative emotions sometimes overwhelm her. The second verse is spent grieving for the pain of the world, and Carey sings, "Sometimes I'm so despondent / that I feel the need to / fly like a bird / take to the sky."[97] Here, Carey ostensibly admits that her depressive symptoms occasionally lead her to a suicidality that makes her lean further into the benefit that an early death might bring. This is a sentiment missing from her painting of the picture of heaven in the first verse; it is a place where pain and suffering are no more, but by the second verse we learn that this relief is something that Carey actively craves.

Carey's vocal delivery is markedly different from the first verse to the second, as well. For all of Carey's vocal power and its capability, she is remarkably restrained in the song's first moments. Her tone is soft and reverent, prayer-like in its whispery tone. It evokes a sense of solitude – that perhaps Carey is expressing these thoughts to a higher power and no one else. Her voice remains in this particular timbre through the first chorus and second verse. It isn't until the second chorus, after the lyrical expression of suicidal thoughts, that Carey's voice is unleashed. In her chest voice, she exclaims the "...fly like a bird / take to the sky"[98] that starts the chorus, following the head-voice-resonant "Sometimes I'm so despondent / that I feel the need to…[.]"[99] The effect of this change in vocal tone is that while the beginning of the song was a private prayer, fairly nondescript in its understanding of heaven, from this moment on it can be

[95] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 0:40-0:42.
[96] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 0:46-0:53.
[97] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 1:33-1:41.
[98] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 1:38-1:41.
[99] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 1:33-1:38.

interpreted as a more direct and personal plea for deliverance from Carey's own symptoms of depression.

The voice of Pastor Keaton returns after the second chorus to answer Carey's doubts of her own survival and to reassure her of her faith when he says, "He said He'll never forsake you or leave you alone. Trust Him."[100] This moment seemingly gives Carey the strength to carry her into the song's bridge where she further pleads for emotional strength in the face of her troubles.

Backed by a gospel choir, Carey acknowledges both herself and listeners when she assuages fears and proclaims, "With God's love, you'll survive."[101] Despite her earlier despondence, the outro of "Fly Like a Bird" proves Carey's desperate need for survival. There is a palpable need as her voice reaches to the top of her head voice range on lyrics such as "Please don't let the world break me tonight"[102] and "Carry me higher, Lord / 'Cause I need the strength of you to survive."[103] When Carey went public with her diagnosis of bipolar II, she named a reliance on faith as one of the core tenets of her approach to treatment. In light of this, "Fly Like a Bird" acts as catharsis and an act of healing for Carey in managing the experience of bipolar disorder.

Caution was released six months after the *People* magazine cover upon which Carey revealed she had been living with bipolar II. In the *People* magazine story, Carey is candid about her experience with diagnosis in 2001 as well as her reluctance to accept treatment at the time. With this hindsight, it makes sense that while *EoM* is certainly confident and celebratory in its delivery, it is very centered around lyrical motifs of concealment and buried pain. The writing, recording, and release of *Caution* served as a balm for Carey who says that, while she can't

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[100] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 2:04-2:09.
[101] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 2:28-2:37.
[102] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 2:45-2:48.
[103] Carey, "Fly Like a Bird," 3:07-3:14.

expect everyone to understand what she has gone through, it makes her happy to know that the especially personal things she has written have helped others because "it saved [her] life to write it."[104] Thus, one of the major themes of *Caution* appears to be a reclamation of a sense of agency.

The opening minutes of *Caution* effectively establish the album's tone. "GTFO" (shorthand for "get the fuck out") is the opening track and makes clear that *Caution* is Carey's call for agency after a period of personal and professional upheaval.

In a coarse, yet whispery tone that remains throughout most of the song, Carey shirks off an ex-romantic partner who mistreated her during their relationship. Where a song like "Circles" might spend its time overanalyzing the complexities of the relationship and where it went wrong, "GTFO" takes a more silver-tongued approach. After spending the verse questioning her partner's motives, she simply states "I ain't the type to play the martyr / How 'bout you get the fuck out."[105] Carey is making the decision in this relationship; she holds the power over her interpersonal relationships in a way she might not have in the past.

The more subdued vocal timbre that Carey employs in "GTFO" does not imply a lack of power either vocally or narratively within the song's context. Rather, it speaks to the song's intimate and vulnerable address of a loved one. The quieter, but no weaker, tone hits the listener's ear as though Carey is singing as the last vestiges of an argument with the song's subject. This level of vocal intimacy on the album's opening track supports a reading of the song, and album, as being intensely personal. Further, when Carey playfully sings the lyric in the chorus that reads, "Scusami, Mimi called you a valet-et-et"[106] she is referring to herself in the

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[104] "Mariah Carey Genius Level: The Full Interview on Her Iconic Hits & Songwriting Process," Genius, November 16, 2018, YouTube video, 31:03-31:04, https://youtu.be/rdMQ31DlTjg?si=plEhxYXOLLJzGVx-.
[105] "GTFO," track #1 on Mariah Carey, *Caution*, Epic Records, 2018, Apple Music audio, 0:50-0:56.
[106] Carey, "GTFO," 1:22-1:24.

third person by the nickname “Mimi.” As previously illuminated, this nickname used by Carey and those closest to her is a signal of the truest version of herself and establishes a thematic link to *EoM*. The use of “Mimi” also denotes an increased level of vulnerability and perceived authenticity and establishes a narrative of truth for the album moving forward. The use of third person perspective as a songwriting device will be further discussed in my next chapter.

Additionally, when Carey admits to turning to alcohol consumption as a treatment for emotional pain (“Might as well down this Caymus bottle”)[107] or ignoring pleas from friends to see the error of her ways,[108] she imbues these acts with a level of truth to her emotional inner life and thus to her experience of her mental health.

If “GTFO” introduces *Caution*’s emphasis on the reclamation of agency, “A No No” is the album’s thesis statement on the theme. The song’s first line is “I ain’t even mad, no, not like before.”[109] Here, the lyric alludes to a distance between a past of emotional dysregulation and a present sense of control. This doesn’t negate the anger or general discontent that Carey might feel toward the song’s subject, someone who has lied to her repeatedly and who she refers to as a “snake.”[110] Instead, Carey channels the anger into actionable steps toward self-preservation via cutting this person off in a ambiguous sense (I can’t waste no time, pay no ‘ttention to you”)[111] as well as decisively by referencing her personal lawyer (Get me Ed Shapiro on the phone / Case closed.)[112]

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[107] Carey, “GTFO,” 0:45-0:49.
[108] Carey, “GTFO,” 1:29-1:49.
[109] “A No No,” track #4 on Mariah Carey, *Caution*, Epic Records, 2018, Apple Music audio, 0:12-0:15.
[110] Carey, “A No No,” 0:17-0:20.
[111] Carey, “A No No, “0:47-0:49.
[112] Carey, “A No No,” 0:32-0:34.

The playful adlibs that recur throughout the song, including Carey's jubilant "woo!"[113] and the giggling that takes place in the song's bridge and outro[114] contribute to the song's atmosphere – its central essence being overcoming mental or emotional struggle through finding the joy in it and specifically finding the joy in saying the word "no."

In the second verse of "A No No," Carey continues to assert what a sense of agency looks like for her, with her lyrical flair. In the melodic style of a schoolyard taunt, she sings, "Even if I was the last woman alive / I would be like Ginger, you ain't Gilligan, I / I really don't care, I'm in love with the island / Rockin' Dior 'cause it goes with my diamonds."[115] The teasing delivery of these lyrics, referencing the beautiful film star and bumbling fool characters in Ginger and Gilligan respectively, from 1960s classic television show *Gilligan's Island*, allow Carey to poke fun at her celebrity status while simultaneous stating that if given the choice she would prefer solitude on a deserted island to the company of those she deems traitorous.

In her autobiography, Carey writes of how when she was hospitalized in 2001 it was largely due to her implicit trust of her mother and brother, who took advantage of her mental instability. While Carey was the one to check herself into what her family told her was a "spa," she quickly learned that she "had no control over [her] situation" and, when she tried to check herself out, "to [her] horror, [she] discovered that [she] couldn't." She writes that "it took several days of red tape and paperwork to get out."[116] Carey writes that upon starting therapy, she realized:

> I was supporting *everybody* around me, and they had the audacity to throw me into institutions, give me drugs and try to take control of my life…The therapist made an obvious suggestion: if [my family] could prove I was unstable, they

[113] Carey, "A No No," 0:34.
[114] Carey, "A No No," 2:26-3:07.
[115] Carey, "A No No," 1:11-1:21.
[116] Mariah Carey, "Broken Down," in *The Meaning of Mariah Carey*, (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2020), 258.

> certainly could have believed they would become the executors of my affairs. (Carey, 2020, 266).

This loss of agency is not uncommon for those living with bipolar disorder. But it is also not uncommon for women celebrities deemed unfit to advocate for themselves due to perceived mental incapacity, especially when the potential for financial gain from said incapacity is involved. Carey's comfort with her own company and refusal bend to the will of others solidifies that "A No No" and *Caution* as a whole can be interpreted as Carey reaping the benefits of her own personal approach to treatment for bipolar disorder and her mental health more broadly, one that reclaims a sense of agency that is paramount for Carey.

Audibility

In analyzing the production styles and techniques across Ye and Carey's catelogues, there are notable differences. For one, the tricks of Ye's production are much more generally audible. Despite the fact that Carey also is heavily involved in the production side of her work, it is safe to assume that she would probably think of herself as a songwriter – and singer – before anything else.[117] By contrast, Ye began as a producer long before he found success as a rapper. He continues to produce extensively for other artists – the "Wyoming sessions" that brought forth *ye* yielded four other albums executively produced by Ye.[118] All this is to say, the listener might think of Carey's production as generally functioning to highlight her vocals and as being broadly unobtrusive. Conversely, one might say that Ye uses the vocal elements of his music as a playground for inventive production techniques.

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[117] "Mariah Carey Genius Level: The Full Interview on Her Iconic Hits & Songwriting Process," Genius, November 16, 2018, YouTube video, 1:06:19, https://youtu.be/rdMQ31DlTjg?si=plEhxYXOLLJzGVx-.

[118] These albums included *DAYTONA* by Pusha T, *NASIR* by Nas, the Kid Cudi and Ye collab album entitled *KIDS SEE GHOSTS*, and *K.T.S.E.* by Teyona Taylor.

When it comes to how the human voice sits within each artist's respective music, examples pertaining to the audibility of their lyrics brings to light unique statements made with regards to how Ye and Carey communicate authenticity, honesty, and vulnerability in relation to their mental health experiences.

Ye's "Runaway (feat. Pusha T)" from *MBDTF* is perhaps the album's emotional centrepiece. Often heralded as one of Ye's best songs amongst his sprawling body of work, "Runaway (feat. Pusha T)" is an open address to a scorned loved one in which Ye lists the myriad ways in which he was at fault in the relationship.

Six minutes into the song's nine minute duration, once its instrumental grandiosity has fallen away to its sparse piano, Ye's voice rings out, "I'ma be honest."[119] This line, however, is almost unintelligible due to the heavy distortion used to muffle Ye's delivery as he speaks into a vocoder. He proceeds to sings what sounds like the lyrics of the hook – "And I always find, yeah, I always find something wrong / You been puttin' up with my shit just way too long / I'm so gifted at finding what I don't like the most / So I think it's time for us to have a toast"[120] – but it sounds more like an electric guitar than anything else. For Ye to preface the song's unintelligible outro by saying explicitly that it is the part of the song in which he is about to be honest has the effect of distancing himself from the listener and the subject of the song, thereby furthering the song's themes of pushing loved ones away due to the toll of one's mental health. Bipolar disorder has been shown to impact the quality of one's interpersonal relationships. Though the capacity for long-term stable relationships is, of course, as possible for those with bipolar disorder as it is for anyone else, individuals experiencing the disorder in its most severe forms often have

[119] West, "Runaway (feat. Pusha T)," 6:00.
[120] West, "Runaway (feat. Pusha T)," 6:54-7:16.

difficulty maintaining the strength of their relationships as their moods shift between periods of mania, stability, and depression.[121]

Despite seldom being performed live in the years since its release, "I Wish You Knew," from Carey's *EoM*, opens with the sounds of a cheering crowd.[122] Carey speaks into the microphone, the mixing of which simulates the echo of the arena that might contain such an audience, as she states, "I just wish you knew / How much I still love you."[123] This plainly spoken confession stands in stark contrast to the vocal production displayed through the rest of the song. As Carey articulates the drive to reveal her hidden romantic feelings, and how the act of concealment leaves her "paralyzed,"[124] she is vocally confident. She belts on the song's chorus, hitting a D♯5 on the final exclamation of the chorus – a cathartic "I wish you knew / How I love you, baby."[125] Her annunciation is crisp, a potential tell that these lyrics pertaining to her innermost emotional vulnerability must be communicated clearly.

Then, the song's bridge returns to the introductory framing of the concert-going experience. Only somewhat audible through the din of the cheers, Carey says the following:

> I don't know if anybody else out there tonight
>
> Knows what it feels like
>
> To want somebody so bad

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[121] Rebecca S. Siegel et. al, "Longitudinal Associations Between Interpersonal Relationship Functioning and Mood Episode Severity in Youth With Bipolar Disorder," T*he journal of nervous and mental disease* 203, no. 3 (2015): 194–204.
[122] "I Wish You Knew," track #11 on Mariah Carey, *The Emancipation of Mimi*, The Island Def Jam Music Group, 2005, Apple Music audio, 0:06-0:15.
[123] Carey, "I Wish You Knew," 0:10-0:13.
[124] Carey, "I Wish You Knew," 0:33-0:37.
[125] Carey, "I Wish You Knew, " 1:02-1:08.

> That nothing and nobody can ever seem to fill that void
>
> But that's the situation that I'm talking about right now
>
> And if you feel me
>
> Sing this song with me, c'mon. (Carey, "I Wish You Knew," 2:06-2:28.)

While the noise surrounding the lyrics could be seen as an act of their concealment, thus supporting the song's overarching narrative, the other interpretation is that the bridge's production represents Carey reaching out for camaraderie amidst her emotional woes. Of course, she does this lyrically by asking those who feel the same as her to sing along to her song as an anthem but the uproar that surrounds her makes clear that this is not just an ask.

Carey uses the audibility of her lyrics in these moments to acknowledge that there are others who definitely feel the same as she does, represents them musically, and – rather than sing to them as she would address the typical fan at a concert or in the way that she sings to the song's subject – speaks to them in a conversational and casual manner. In this instance, Carey breaks down the barrier that might exist between herself and others that might be suffering, relying on the social support that is so critical in providing empathy to those living with the challenging aspects of bipolar disorder and disrupting the ruminative thoughts that often accompany the low moods of depression.

Conclusion

Through the use of genre as a conduit, Ye and Carey are able to musically and lyrically explicate the nuances of their experiences with bipolar disorder beyond those of mere symptomatic presentation. In analyzing, not just the lyrics, but, *how* the lyrics are performed

across two albums apiece, a portrait emerges that both communicates the individuals' lived experience with bipolar disorder as well as speaks to common shared experiences of those who live with the disorder. Beyond the lyrics, the production choices within the music, specifically relating to audibility, reflect certain distinctions when it comes to the theme of emotional vulnerability in sharing the experience of mental health struggle on a large-scale or in a public forum.

MBDTF, *ye*, *EoM*, and *Caution* all share this theme of a struggle with when and how to be vulnerable and authentic in the face of a global audience and public scrutiny. The albums frame themselves as self-portraits of artists so frequently either misinterpreted or otherwise reduced to simple labels by a world comfortable with the boxes it has created for them – be that when it comes to their star personas or relating to the treatment of their mental health in particular. My next chapter will continue to use these four albums as the context for an investigation into the mental health experiences of their authors, this time through the lens of public versus self-perception and the musical theme of self-referentiality.

Chapter 4: Public vs. Self-Perception, Mental Health, and Musical Self-Referentiality

Introduction

Suffice to say, Ye and Carey can be polarizing figures. The heightened drama of their public appearances and the control with which they approach their work has, over the years, rubbed many the wrong way and has contributed to the perception of them as in some way or another difficult to handle. In this chapter, I more deeply analyze the complexities at work in the shaping of these perceptions, and how they are intertwined with the stigma of bipolar disorder. I compare the public "bad behaviour" allowed or expected of both Ye and Carey and how it relates to the gendered expectations of genius. Further, I explain how a level of fame seen by Ye and Carey inherently impacts one's self perception and when someone is dealing with bipolar disorder on top of this, internalized stigma is likely. Finally, I utilize musical examples of self-referentiality to demonstrate Ye and Carey's respective relationships to their public personas and their self-perception.

Public Perception

In this section, I detail the differences in the public perception of Ye and Carey. I articulate how the world has responded to Ye and Carey and contributed to the shaping of their star personas as "genius" and "diva" respectively, and I detail some of the specifics of this juxtaposition.

I find it necessary to specify what exactly I mean by the "public" in "public perception." While the public could be anyone from superfans, to the casual listener, to music critics, I am generally using "public" perception to mean "media-enforced" perception. In the case of both Ye and Carey, tabloid media has played a crucial role in the shaping of attitudes toward their music and personas independent of their respective artistic output. Especially as their careers overlap as

Ye's took off in the early-to-mid 2000s and Carey's in the early 1990s, social media and other forms of online tabloid journalism allowed unprecedented access to all manner of celebrities. Dubbed the era of those "famous for being famous"[126] or "famous for doing nothing,"[127] even those celebrities famous for *something*, like Ye and Carey, saw their artistic accomplishments eclipsed by their larger-than-life personas.

The genius vs. diva dichotomy

I also wish to articulate how, despite similarities in their approaches to their artistry, the public perception of Ye and Carey as "genius" vs. "diva" respectively is due in part to the misogyny that has permeated the treatment of Carey as a celebrity. There is a certain threshold concerning what is deemed publicly acceptable behaviour in the context of exhibiting symptoms of mental illness, particularly those with psychotic symptoms. Especially when it comes to key observable moments that can be attributed to their experiences with bipolar disorder, the level of insubordination permitted along this continuum of publicly acceptable behavior is different for Ye than for Carey.

A common cliché among Ye fans is to reiterate that "he made *Graduation*"[128] in the wake of any of the artist's controversies – citing one of his albums most commonly regarded as his best, or ostensibly where his "genius" is most accessible – as a way to underscore that the man's unpredictability does not outweigh his contribution to the musical and cultural landscape. It is this perception of Ye as genius, as architect of his own kingdom, that has been reinforced by fans

[126] Frank Ferudi, "Celebrity Culture," *Society* 47, no. 6 (Nov. 2010): 493, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-010-9367-6.
[127] Andrea McDonnell, review of *Keeping Up the Kardashian Brand: Celebrity, Materialism, and Sexuality*, by Amanda Scheiner McClain, *Journal of American culture* 39 (2016): 105.
[128] "He Made Graduation," Know Your Meme, last modified December 2, 2022, https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/he-made-graduation/.

and critics and adopted by the media – and certainly Ye himself. I do not mean to suggest that any or all of Ye's various controversies can be or should be attributed to his bipolar disorder, and many of such moments categorically should *not* be. Rather, I suggest that the uninformed public sees little to no difference between someone suffering through the symptoms of a manic episode and someone torching their own career for the sake of it when the person doing it is a man they call a genius.

Conversely, Carey has routinely been labeled the old adage of "difficult to work with." She is known to make seemingly outlandish demands on her tour rider, routinely show up late to scheduled engagements, and notably doesn't believe in the traditional passage of time. The label of "diva," inclusive of the definition that pre requires a level of self-importance, has followed her for decades (Carey writes that *her* definition of diva is the "classic one: a distinguished and celebrated female singer; a woman of outstanding talent in the world of opera…and by extension in theater, cinema, and popular music.")[129] Yet, never in my extensive research have I seen anything akin to the phrase "but she made *Butterfly*" – the 1997 album oft-regarded as Carey's best and an album with inarguable cultural impact, longevity, and musical excellence – used to excuse any of Carey's "diva" behaviour.

Despite the ways in which Ye and Carey might appear musically or stylistically different in their ultimate execution of their musical visions, their approach to the music and accompanying visual aesthetic is rather similar. They both write the vast majority of their own material, they are both heavily involved on the production side of their music (admittedly, Ye more so than Carey), and both artists have been known to direct their own music videos and contribute creatively to the visual storytelling of their work. What's more is both Ye and Carey

[129] Mariah Carey, "Divas," *The Meaning of Mariah Carey* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2020), 303.

are known for having a perfectionist work ethic that dominates the studios in which they work. While it certainly can't be attributed entirely to their bipolar disorder, the perfectionism to which Ye and Carey are drawn makes for a natural breeding ground for such symptoms to creep in.

During the recording of *MBDTF*, Ye would regularly forgo sleep for days at a time in the name of working on the album, having several ideas on the go at once. He would often retool entire tracks in the time it would take his collaborators to sleep and reenter the studio the next morning.[130] Ye's obvious state of unwell during this time has been described in equal measure as both manic and focused, with the former seemingly meant to convey the intensity or force of the latter rather than an actual concern for the artist's mental health at the time of the album's production.

Carey has also spoken about how she often found herself working on music through the highs of her hypomanic episodes, telling *People* magazine:

> For a long time I thought I had a severe sleep disorder, but it wasn't normal insomnia and I wasn't lying awake counting sheep. I was working and working and working … I was irritable and in constant fear of letting people down (Cagle, 2018).

It was the depressive periods that inevitably followed Carey's periods of hypomania, in which she would become lethargic, lonely, and guilty at what she perceived to be a lack of productivity, that prompted her to ultimately seek treatment for her bipolar disorder.[131] The benefit of great music was no longer enough to justify the toll it was taking on her well-being as well as the professional relationships she was sacrificing due to her inconsistency, and the impact it was having on her two young children. Where it seems that Ye's intensity of focus was viewed as a

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[130] Kirk Walker Graves, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 38-39.
[131] Cagle, "Mariah Carey: 'It's Time to Finally Share My Story'," 45.

key facet of his musical excellence, Carey's appears to have been her professional downfall in some way.

Misogyny & race

But just how much of this "genius" vs. "diva" dichotomy can be attributed to the way that women – with mental illness, Black women, in music – are mistreated in our historical and modern North American context? I would argue a great deal. In my first chapter, I articulated the historical precedent for the mistreatment of women living with mental illnesses, particularly those with what we today term psychotic symptoms. The roots of hysteria and the prototypical "mad woman" run deep and continue to influence contemporary understanding of women's mental health challenges.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that women are among those most likely to recognize a need for mental health treatment,[132] there is also a significant amount of research that indicates that access to treatment and quality of care for women is impacted by gender-based oppression in both voluntary and involuntary mental health treatment contexts. Often, the logistics of involuntary mental health treatment, treatment including forced psychiatric hospitalization, replicate the dynamics of gender-based violence found in the real world particularly because "actions that would in other contexts be understood as violent and unacceptable are justified because they are perceived to provide necessary forms of "care" and "treatment" to people experiencing mental distress."[133] This strips a patient of bodily autonomy

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[132] L.H. Andrade et. al, "Barriers to Mental Health Treatment: Results from the WHO World Mental Health Surveys," *Psychological Medicine* 44, no.6 (2014): 1303-1317. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291713001943.
[133] Emma Jane Tseris et. al, "“‘My Voice Was Discounted the Whole Way Through’: A Gendered Analysis of Women's Experiences of Involuntary Mental Health Treatment," *Affilia* 37, no. 4 (2022): 645–663.

because of a widespread perceived notion that the mentally ill patient is unable to assert what is best for them in their care. It further reinforces biological models of ascribing mental illness in the first place as well as social power structures that seek to remind a woman that what is wrong with her is hardwired and *not* reinscribed by the social conditions that mediate symptoms of mental distress.

Gender is certainly not the only barrier to comprehensive and high quality mental health treatment, and when race is factored in the challenges for the individual living with the mental illness increase exponentially. As Constantine writes, "As a result of living for generations in a society sickened with the viruses of racism and discrimination, the physical and mental health of many African Americans has been compromised."[134] Constantine goes on to write that the increased risk attributed to Black individuals for certain physical health conditions, often shoddily by medical professions, such as hypertension, can be explained in part by the mental health stressors that accompany the experience of living as a racial minority. Further, she notes that even those medical professionals who purport to be free of racist beliefs are not wholly incapable of separating themselves from the unconscious biases that permeate an institutionally racist environment. For example:

> Symptoms of paranoid thinking, such as pervasive suspicions of being harmed by strangers, colleagues, or institutions (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), which may be symptomatic of paranoid personality disorder or even schizophrenia, could actually represent legitimate and rational thoughts of African Americans who encounter racism daily in its many forms. (Constantine, 2006, 38).

Of course, Ye and Carey hold a considerable amount more privilege than the average person when it comes to accessing mental health treatment resources. Despite their positions as

[134] Madonna G. Constantine, "Institutional Racism against African Americans: Physical and Mental Health Implications," in *Addressing Racism : Facilitating Cultural Competence in Mental Health and Educational Settings*, by Madonna G.Constantine and Sue Derald Wing (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), 33.

otherwise marginalized Black people, and despite Carey's as a Black woman, they are both millionaire celebrities. This does not invalidate what they have articulated as traumatizing experiences in seeking and undergoing treatment for their bipolar disorder and they are as deserving of empathy as anyone else navigating the same complicated and often perverse system. Yet it does complicate how the public is willing to interact with each of them as the narratives of their mental health journeys.

Self-Perception

It is pertinent to analyze how the public perception of both Ye and Carey (in relation to both their art and their mental health) informs their self-perception for a key reason. The stigma surrounding bipolar disorder negatively affects an individual's self esteem and in turn impacts their willingness to seek treatment for their mental health.[135] Illustrating how Ye and Carey have internalized the traits of their public personas and the negative stigma of mental illness effectively shines a light on their relationship to treatment.

In 2012, *The Atlantic* ran a profile on Ye which called him the "American Mozart." While it labeled him "intense, emotional, and frequently out of control,"[136] it also heralded Ye as "at least some kind of musical genius."[137] The comparison to Mozart might raise some eyebrows among purists, and did at the time of the profile's publication. Yet, I recall the fuel it added to the fire for the Ye fanatics that I knew at the time – as it wasn't anything Ye hadn't been saying about himself for years.

The first trailer for *jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy*, shows an early video of Ye in the studio in 2002, explaining to director Coodie that he got into a mild argument with his friend and fellow

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[135] Ellison, Nell, Oliver Mason, and Katrina Scior. "Public beliefs about and attitudes towards bipolar disorder." *Journal of affective disorders* 175 (April 2015): 116-123.
[136] David Samuels, "American Mozart," *The Atlantic*, May 15, 2012, 72.
[137] Samuels, "American Mozart," 74.

rapper Rhymefest when the latter suggested that Ye was not yet at a level that would merit calling himself a genius. When Rhymefest asks, "who are you to call yourself a genius?" Ye gives a cheeky and knowing look into the camera.[138] This was two years prior to the release of any of Ye's own studio albums; a time where he was only known for producing beats for others (certainly to great success, but he was not at all a household name) yet he was ready to proclaim himself a creative genius perhaps as a signal that others should take him as seriously as he takes himself.

Ye expanded on why the label of "genius" is so important to him in a 2015 interview, explaining that he feels the need to call himself a genius:

> …because otherwise I'm called "celebrity," I'm called "n******," I'm called "rapper." And when they use [those words] it's not in a positive way…so I have to define who I am. All of my aspirations are things that, currently, only sixty-year-old white people do. (SHOWstudio, 2015, 9:41-10:10).

He continues by saying that to reduce him to the above restrictive labels and "try to take the piss out of him" for his endeavors in fields such as his fashion brand, denying him what he believes to be his freedom to apply the term "creative genius" to himself, is "a form of discrimination and racism."[139]

While it might have been Ye's insistent belief in his own grandiosity, which over time served as its own protective measure against the very real forces of oppression working to pigeon-hole him and devalue his artistry, this steadfast refusal to relinquish the myth of genius also seems to have impacted his willingness to seek pharmaceutical treatment for his mental health. When speaking with David Letterman about his decision to forgo medication to control

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[138] "jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy | Official Teaser | Netflix," Netflix, January 10, 2022, YouTube video, 0:00-0:13, https://youtu.be/i-e_YPO-RYc?si=_StFJUTezVvOlC3T.
[139] "Kanye West: In Camera: SHOWstudio Live Interview," SHOWstudio, October 6, 2015, YouTube video, 10:42-11:35, https://www.youtube.com/live/fYwiR1kA7gI?si=cwQ17QmsbmM_kATg.

the episodic nature of his illness, he named the perceived negative impact to his creative process as the main reason for quitting. Ye says, glibly addressing the interview's audience, "If you guys want these crazy ideas, these crazy stages, this crazy music; there's a chance it might come from a crazy person."[140] In late 2018, Ye tweeted "I cannot be on meds and make watch the throne or dark fantasy level music" referencing *MBDTF* as well as his 2011 collaborative album with Jay-Z, *Watch the Throne*. He followed this with, "You don't make runaway on medication" referring to the much-expounded upon *MBDTF* track.[141]

Ye strongly mythologizes the narrative of the genius' ties to mental instability in his resistance toward traditional forms of medicine. He also seemingly prioritizes his public persona as a genius, as well as the personal fulfillment derived from making music he deems on the level of genius, above his mental well-being.

An entry on Carey's 2001 hospitalization for exhaustion after her surprise appearance on MTV's *Total Request Live* (*TRL*) in the book *Celebrity Tantrums! The Official Dirt* begins, "Hospitalization for "extreme exhaustion" is a privilege enjoyed only by the rich and pampered. It's difficult to muster up pity for a wealthy, supremely beautiful, sought-after artist when she claims the demands of her grueling work schedule…have sent her into a tailspin."[142] Published in 2003, this book goes into detail about specific public outbursts, or "tantrums," that caused particular celebrities to lose favour in the public eye. It positions Carey's mental health crisis alongside some celebrities who have cheated on their spouses, committed actual criminal

[140] *My Next Guest Needs No Introduction with David Letterman*, season 2, episode 1, "Kanye West," directed by Michael Steed, aired May 31st 2019, on Netflix.
[141] Mitchell Peters, "Kanye West on His Mental Health, New Music: '6 Months Off Meds I Can Feel Me Again'," *Billboard*, December 15, 2018, https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/kanye-west-twitter-tweetstorm-drake-mental-illness-health-bipolar-new-music-8490421/.
[142] Lisa Brandt, *Celebrity Tantrums! The Official Dirt* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2003), 35.

offenses, and bafflingly, Kurt Cobain's suicide. It seems that even amidst other entries that focus on mental health, the perception of Carey as someone that should be above it all in some way – perhaps because of the image of her early career as one belonging to a poised and sophisticated diva in the traditional sense– was incongruous with any amount of sympathy.

In her autobiography, Carey writes that, after the *TRL* incident, the world who once viewed her as the "Cinderella of Sony [Records]"[143] was eager to watch her downfall. She continues, "Some mainstream media…places a mask over pain and presents it as entertainment news. It was visible, and I was vulnerable. [The media] fed on the spectacle and just wanted more – more stumbles, more embarrassment, more breaks, more ridicule."[144] Carey notes that the overblown aftermath to what was a planned stunt on *TRL* also emphasized her being both woman and Black. The way in which host Carson Daly shouted that "Mariah Carey is stripping on *TRL* right now"[145] simply because Carey removed her oversized t-shirt to reveal a tank-top promoting her upcoming album, *Glitter*, drummed up unnecessary misogynistic backlash. When Carey's physical and mental exhaustion from the media circus following her eventually became too overwhelming, she lashed out at her mother, Patricia. Carey says her mother, who is white, became frightened of her outbursts and retaliated via her tried-and-true method, writing, "When my mother feels scared, her complete assurance in the historic evidence that whiteness will *always* be protected activates – and she often calls the cops."[146] Carey writes of observing a "the equivalent of a secret-society handshake, some sort of white-woman-in-distress cop code"[147]

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[143] Mariah Carey, "Resting in Pieces," *The Meaning of Mariah Carey* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2020), 237.
[144] Carey, "Pieces," 237.
[145] "Mariah Carey strip tease on TV," geronimos, 2008, Dailymotion video, 1:21, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5lnxh.
[146] Carey, "Calamity and Dog Hair," *The Meaning of Mariah Carey* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2020), 252.
[147] Carey, "Dog Hair," 253.

between her mother and the police despite the fact that they were standing in Carey's home; a transference of power from the individual experiencing actual acute mental distress to another person simply on the basis of shared racial makeup and biases.

Carey refers to what she perceived to be "the stigma of a lifelong disease that would define [her] and potentially end [her career]"[148] as an underlying facet of the fifteen-year denial of her bipolar disorder. She also says, "People who escaped the life I grew up with don't want to go backward…my environment as a child didn't just intensify my disease, it impacted my willingness to seek a long-term solution for it."[149] The insecurity regarding the fragility of her public vs. private life, alongside the fear of a loss of control of her personal narrative likely had a significant effect on Carey's relationship to treatment for bipolar disorder.

Musical Self-Referentiality

Through tools of both production and lyrics, Ye and Carey imbue their work with a level of self-referentiality that allows them to comment on the ways that their public personas, subsequent self-perception, and relationship to their respective mental health have affected their emotional expression. By honing in on some of the markers of the experience of bipolar disorder that I explained in earlier chapters, such as a desire for a sense of agency and struggles with vulnerability, I am able to observe these themes as they manifest in Ye and Carey's music alongside the theme of musical self-referentiality. Ye and Carey are uniquely positioned to comment on the experiences of bipolar disorder while simultaneously positioning those feelings with the feelings associated with the incongruous nature of their public vs. self-perception.

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[148] Cagle, "Mariah Carey: 'It's Time to Finally Share My Story'," 45.
[149] Cagle, "Mariah Carey: 'It's Time to Finally Share My Story'," 45.

Throughout both Ye and Carey's discographies, lyrical references to how the music itself is going to be perceived once it is heard by the listener abound. When Ye raps "I don't joke with no one / They'll say "he died so young""[150] followed by "they wanna see me go ape / All they gotta do is speak on Ye"[151] at the tail end of "I Thought About Killing You," Ye calls attention to what I perceive to be both his musical and personal self-seriousness and notes that it will be cited by the public, perhaps fans and detractors alike, as a reason for the suicide Ye uses as a framing device throughout the song.

Carey employs similar tactics throughout her music, notably on "8th Grade." In the prechorus, Carey sings, "Something is telling me you're ready, am I wrong? / Maybe the lyrics are too heavy in my song."[152] On a song about the limits of the subject's romantic affection for the narrator, I believe Carey is also asking if listeners are ready for the depth of her emotional vulnerability her lyrics convey and seemingly momentarily backpedals on what she might have revealed thus far.

Both Ye and Carey also frequently refer to themselves in the third person, especially by the names "Ye" and "Mimi" as opposed to their full names of "Kanye" or "Mariah." This occurs in the aforementioned lyrics of songs such as Ye's "I Thought About Killing You" and Carey's "GTFO." It is my belief that the use of these nicknames, and eventual legal name in the case of Ye, denotes an increase in conveyed authenticity, and this has been expressed certainly by Carey when discussing the title for *EoM*. Ye cited the number of times that the word "ye" appears in the bible as part of his decision for changing his name, as well as a desire for increased connectivity to the human experience. He said,"...in the Bible it means you. So I'm you, I'm us, it's us…[my

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[150] "I Thought About Killing You," track #1 on Kanye West, *ye*, GOOD Music and Def Jam Recordings, 2018, Apple Music audio, 2:50-5:53.
[151] West, "I Thought About Killing You," 4:18-4:24
[152] "8th Grade," track #8 on Mariah Carey, *Caution*, Epic Records, Apple Music audio, 1:01-1:08.

name] went from Kanye, which means the only one, to just Ye – just being a reflection of our good, our bad, our confused, everything."[153]

The use of third person perspective is employed to particularly rousing effect by Ye on the outro of "Yikes," the second track off *ye*. "Yikes" sees the artist grapple with the loss of control he experiences during both manic episodes and the high of opiate use, with explicit lyrical references to both. The song's emotional climax is a strained, spoken (rather than rapped) outro in which Ye says:

> You see?
>
> You see?
>
> That's what I'm talking about
>
> That's why I fuck with Ye
>
> See, that's my third person
>
> See, that's my bipolar shit, n****, what?
>
> That's my superpower, n****, ain't no disability
>
> I'm a superhero
>
> I'm a superhero (West, "Yikes," 2:27-3:06).

Ye then lets out a guttural scream to close the song.

In these lyrics, Ye seems to directly address the listener by asking them to reflect on the song's lyrical content up to this point ("you see?") and then appears to interact both with his public persona as well as public perception of bipolar disorder. Ye likens the experience of his

[153] Larisha Paul, "Kanye West Has Changed His Name to Ye — Just Ye," *Rolling Stone*, October 18, 2021, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/kanye-west-ye-name-change-1243791/.

bipolar disorder to that of a separate personhood or personality, that of “Ye,” potentially as opposed to the “Kanye” the world was used to seeing at the time. He reads as confrontational in his language and delivery and asks listeners to acknowledge his bipolar disorder as the key to his creative genius that he believes it to be – his superpower –, rather than the hindrance to his functioning that others might believe it to be, or that the disorder might be perceived as in general.

Carey follows “GTFO” on *Caution* with the second track, entitled “With You.” The song lyrically focuses on the strength of romantic love in the face of one’s own internal doubts, be they from past relationships or the looming shadow of public opinion. Carey establishes the presumably autobiographical narrative through the framing of a third person set-up. The lyrics of the first verse read:

> It was all so overwhelming
> She was like, “I don't know, don’t tell me”
> He had eyes that said, “Girl, I’ll save you”
> She had doubts, like they might not make it
> So they both held tight to face it
> There were vows, she was bound to take ‘em
> She was full of such trepidation
> There in front of the whole damn nation (Carey, “With You,” 0:25-0:52).

Carey expresses the truth of her past romantic foibles (an apparent reliance on a romantic partner as her saviour, trepidation at an impending marriage) and untangles how the associated emotions were related to the events having played out in front of the world. Having these private moments revealed to the public was apparently deeply overwhelming to Carey; she goes on to sing that "it was war" and that she was unable to "predict the coming storm."[154]

Carey has cited the constant media surveillance of her as a significant barrier to ultimately seeking treatment for her bipolar disorder, telling *People*, "Until recently I lived in denial and isolation and in constant fear someone would expose me."[155] She feared that her career would be over, and that no one would want to work with "such an "unstable" person."[156] Thus, she hid her diagnosis from the world and denied it to herself – the lyric "she was like, "I don't know, don't tell me" could be alluding to this. Carey further ties the third person framework of "With You" to her artistic legacy through lyrical references to her back catalogue. For example, the line "He said, "I been loving you so long / ever since that Bone Thugz song" / You ain't gotta break down / You're too strong"[157] is a reference to Carey's 1997 song "Breakdown," which features Bone Thugz n Harmony. The lyric in the chorus of "With You" that reads, " Shots of Remy / Playing *Confessions* and our bodies blending"[158] references the Usher album, *Confessions* (2004.) Aside from being a hugely popular album of the era in which it was released, *Confessions* was also executive-produced by longtime Carey collaborator Jermaine Dupri whose work is also seen on *EoM* and *Caution*. Through these references, "With You" becomes not only a song about the strength of a romantic relationship persevering through

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[154] "With You," track #2 on Mariah Carey, *Caution*, Epic Records, Apple Music audio, 0:52-0:58.
[155] Cagle, "Mariah Carey: 'It's Time to Finally Share My Story'," 45.
[156] Mariah Carey, "My Cousin Vinny," *The Meaning of Mariah Carey* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2020), 273.
[157] Carey, "With You," 1:08-1:18.
[158] Carey, "With You," 1:19-1:24.

life challenges but also one asserting that despite the ups and downs of Carey's career in the public eye, *she* has personally persevered. "With You" being chosen as the lead single of *Caution* makes sense to me as a reflection of Carey's past relationship to her mental health in relation to her public life, as well as an affirmation of her inner strength.

"Runaway (feat. Pusha T)" is one of Ye's most ambitious songs, both lyrically and musically. The nine minute magnum opus of *MBDTF*, accompanied by a similarly grandiose half-hour long short film music video upon its release, is unlike anything else in Ye's discography. Ye pokes fun at his public persona of the "[douchebag]…[asshole]...[scumbag]"[159] yet acknowledges his very real faults. He states that he shies away from intimacy, is a workaholic, and finds fault in everything. Ye implores the loved one to whom the song is directed to leave him. These lyrics are underscored by a sample that heightens the song's theme of Ye acknowledging how his mental health impacts his interpersonal relationships as well as his self-perception.

"Runaway (feat. Pusha T)" begins with a sombre and solitary piano line before exploding into distorted programmed drums and a haunting sample, that on its own, shouldn't mean much. It's a brief moment from a 1981 live show from R&B icon Rick James. In a second, he addresses the crowd during a performance of "Mary Jane" by saying "look at ya!"[160] Ye takes that soundbite and stretches it into something akin to a horror film soundscape. "Look at ya!" is repeated over a dozen times and pans in stereo so that Rick James is screaming in the listener's ears as he surrounds you from all angles. It is all-consuming and incredibly jarring in contrast to

[159] "Runaway (feat. Pusha T)," track #9 on Kanye West, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Def Jam Recordings and Roc-A-Fella Records, 2010, Apple Music audio, 1:24-1:30.
[160] "Mary Jane (Live)," track #10 of disc #2 on Rick James, *Street Songs (Deluxe Edition)*, Gordy Records, 2001, Apple Music audio, 6:28.

the song's minute-long, piano-only intro. The sample reappears throughout the song, including under the song's bridge in which Ye begs to be left alone in all his "crazy."[161] This sample functions as a way to let the listener in on how Ye might have been feeling at the time of his massive *MBDTF*-era fame – surrounded on all sides and constantly surveilled. It also appears to be drawing attention to the lyrical moments in which Ye is at his most vulnerable by imploring the listener, or Ye himself, to look at the ways in which the mask of bravado is slipping.

Carey's *Caution* is tonally and musically remarkably upbeat. Even the mid-tempo songs such as "GTFO" are imbued with a vocal playfulness that ensures they don't feel as heavy as their lyrics might insist they should. All such cheekiness is gone on the closing track, "Portrait." The song is a piano ballad supported merely by swelling strings and the twinkling of dream-like chimes. In "Portrait," Carey reflects on her time in the public eye and the toll it has taken on her mental health. Referencing perhaps both the longevity of her career and the constraints such attention has placed on her, Carey asks, "Where do I go from here? / How do I disappear?"[162] in the song's opening lines. Carey further elucidates this disappearing act when she sings, in a fragile tone, that "[she'd] go" were it not for the acceptance that "Tomorrow comes, so [she'll] be here when you rise."[163] The chorus continues, "Look the other way as I bottle myself up inside / I won't let the teardrops spill tonight / Just conceal myself and hide / A portrait of my life."[164]

In these lyrics, Carey appears to simultaneously address listeners and her own internal voice. She understands that she must keep up the appearance of the put-together and well-adjusted woman in the industry, lest the public think less of her and subjugate her after so

[161] West, "Runaway (feat. Pusha T)," 3:00-3:05.
[162] "Portrait," track #10 on Mariah Carey, *Caution*, Epic Records, 2018, Apple Music audio, 0:26-0:38.
[163] Carey, "Portrait," 0:54-1:05.
[164] Carey, "Portrait," 1:11-1:30.

many years spent advocating for a sense of agency; she will be there in the public eye regardless of how she feels. But the “you” to whom Carey is referring in the lyric about staying by someone’s side after a night of troubled thoughts is also conceivably herself. She asserts that she will continue to show up for herself despite the moments in which she might want to give up and despite the ways in which she feels beholden to the role she plays publicly. This narrative of personal strength is furthered in the lyrics of the song’s second verse. As an inverse of the structure of “Fly Like a Bird,” which saw Carey’s baseline hope marred by creeping self-doubt as the song continued, “Portrait” begins with Carey feeling unmoored. By the second verse, *Caution*’s themes of self-determination begin to ring true. Though she is “somewhat desensitized” and “haunted by those severed ties,” Carey remains “that same hopeful child…down, but not demoralized / Unconfined.”[165]

Conclusion

Tracing a throughline of understanding Ye and Carey’s public personas and perception, the subsequent impact they’ve had on their self-perception, and how these threads of identity are related to their mental health paints a picture that supports a reading of the internalized stigma of mental illness. These themes, along with themes common to the experience of said internalized stigma, appear in the music of Ye and Carey through lyrical moments of self-referentiality in which the artists seem acutely self-aware of their reception by the public and intensely emotionally vulnerable as a response.

In my concluding chapter, I further summarize this argument and those of my previous chapters while expanding on areas for future research.

[165] Carey, “Portrait,” 1:45-2:14.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the years since Ye released his self-titled album and Carey released *Caution*, it would appear as though the way the public views them has taken a sharp left turn.

A little over a month before writing this conclusion, on February 1st, 2024, Carey was honoured with the Global Impact Award at the GRAMMYs 2024 Black Music Collective annual ceremony. This is an award that recognizes Black artists "whose dedication to the art form has greatly influenced the industry and whose legacy of service inspires countless individuals worldwide."[166] Carey gratefully accepted her award before quipping, "Is this a real GRAMMY? I haven't seen one in *so* long"[167] referring to her last series of wins during the *EoM* run. It seems the public is more willing to recognize Carey's enduring power as an artist these days; she was also inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2022.

Just over a week after Carey received the Global Impact Award, Ye released his eagerly-anticipated project *Vultures 1*, a collaborative album with singer Ty Dolla $ign. It is Ye's first major release since a tirade of anti semitism and broader hate speech became his every public talking point. The album was released independently after the five different labels to which the duo shopped the project declined to work with Ye on any current and future endeavors. While die hard fans have stuck by his side, the world at large has turned their back on the American Mozart.

In this thesis, I chose to discuss Ye and Carey's careers up to and including 2018 in order to narrow the scope of my research. In the years since her 2018 *People* cover, Carey has

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[166] Rania Aniftos, "Mariah Carey Hilariously Throws Shade at the Grammys at Black Music Collective Event," *Billboard*, February 2, 2024, https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/mariah-carey-throws-shade-grammys-1235596485/.
[167] Aniftos, "Mariah Carey."

seemingly kept the symptoms of her bipolar disorder under control and the public has rewarded her for it. Ye, notably, has not done the same to keep the presentation of his illness private. The one time that Carey had what was considered a major public episode, in 2001, it was near career-ending. In the wake of Ye's numerous public episodes over the years, many of which could be considered career-ending, he has persevered. While the above present-day anecdotes might suggest that the public is more willing to vilify those with more apparent symptoms of bipolar disorder (like Ye today) than those who might be more private or even triumphant in their presentation of it (like Carey today), my previous chapters also illustrate that dimensions of gender and discourses of genius set the stage for how the artists are understood today.

In my second chapter, I highlighted some of the key developments in the history of bipolar disorder from the late 18th to mid-19th century. These included changes made to diagnosis, the advent of psychiatric institutionalization, and the early stages of pharmaceutical treatment. In doing so, I establish a baseline knowledge for understanding how present-day perceptions of bipolar disorder are informed by the historical misunderstanding and mistreatment of those living with this disorder. I also extrapolated the notion of the "tortured genius" and its presumption of whiteness and maleness in order to tie it to the examples of "performed madness" in my chapter. This chapter served as the framework for understanding my approach to the analysis of Ye and Carey's music and reception in the chapters that followed.

In chapter 3, I compared Ye and Carey's music on the basis of vocality. Using examples from their work pertaining to genre, the delivery of lyrics, and the audibility of their voices, I illustrated how each artist communicates the complexity of their experiences with bipolar disorder through their art. By explaining how the chosen musical genres of Ye and Carey have historically functioned to give artists a platform for emotional expression, I have connected both

performers to rich legacies of musical performance. Through his use of sampling in songs like "POWER" and his borrowing of his collaborators' voices for the benefit of emotional heft on songs like "Ghost Town (feat. PARTYNEXTDOOR)," the impact of Ye's lyrics is enhanced by his inventive production techniques. Carey uses the intricate colours of her voice to paint a picture alongside her lyrics. Her vocal fluidity allows for interpretations of her lyrics that communicate, all at once, vulnerability, agency, fragility, and strength. Comparing songs like "Circles" and "GTFO" demonstrates Carey's ability to flex her capacity for intimate delivery and conveys the range of emotional expression associated with her mental health experiences. The examples of audibility I provided further demonstrated each artist's relationship to vulnerability regarding their mental health.

In my fourth chapter, I detailed the way the public has responded to Ye and Carey's artistic output and the construction of their public personas. I also connected this line of thinking to the racism and misogyny present in the treatment of bipolar disorder and related conditions, and drew parallels to Ye and Carey's specific experiences with mental health treatment. I further linked the public personas of Ye and Carey to my earlier work on the idea of the "tortured genius," and reiterated the ways that such an idea is rooted in age-old narratives of maleness and whiteness. Then, I provided an analysis of how time spent in the public eye while living with bipolar disorder — under major media scrutiny — has the potential to inform an individual's self-perception. I made the case for how such self-awareness has manifested in the music of Ye and Carey by way of a musical self-referentiality. I name key examples that point to the artists' interiority, such as how Ye and Carey lyrically address how the music will be perceived once listeners hear it (on "I Thought About Killing You" and "8th Grade" respectively.) I also expand on both performers' public use of private nicknames as a signal of increased authenticity and

vulnerability. As well as highlighting musical moments where Ye and Carey make direct reference to their respective star personas, I point to examples such as Ye's "Yikes" and Carey's "With You" as songs where the use of third person perspective lyrically functions as a way for the artists to make listeners aware of the impact that public perception has on their internal dialogue.

Ye and Carey are not the only artists I considered analyzing as case studies for this project. My initial aim was to focus on the commodification of mental illness in popular music, and I was interested in exploring some of the artists living with bipolar disorder that I listened to growing up — including Britney Spears and Fall Out Boy. All this to say, Ye and Carey are not the only musicians writing about their mental health and there are certainly more threads to explore both within their respective catalogues and within the work of the many other artists who are candid about their experiences with bipolar disorder. There is, naturally, an element of parasociality involved in my assumption that I could know with any level of certainty what Ye or Carey were thinking when detailing their emotional states. I was not a fan of either Ye or Carey prior to starting this work, having only known a handful of hit singles from each and interacting with their respective public images peripherally at most. Yet, in researching and analyzing the work of these artists, I quickly found myself feeling an intimate sense of connection with them based on my perception of our shared mental health experiences. As much as celebrities are real people, their personae are also commodities. The commodification of mental illness as well as the parasocial fan-artist dynamic that can develop as a result is a fascinating area for future research connected to reception studies.

When I first spoke to the psychiatrist who diagnosed me with bipolar disorder, she asked me what kind of tools I already had at my disposal to cope with the challenges I'd been facing

before we discussed further treatment options. I told her I'd been in therapy for several years at that point, that I had the love of supportive family and friends backing me up on every step of the journey, and that I found power in knowing a great deal about the conditions with which I was dealing; therefore felt comfortable advocating for myself in these kinds of settings. "What about your passions, your hobbies?" She asked. I told her I do music. "Well, that's great! Music is one of the best things we *can* do."

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Appendix: Timeline of Major Events